

INTELLIGENT GAMER™

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SEPTEMBER 1996
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You can't just run away from your problems any more. From now on, you'll have to think on your feet.



Jumping, ducking and dodging have always been a critical part of any button-bashing Mario



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You'd never want to be on the bad side of your new pal Mallow. His thunderbolt Special Attack brings a blast of lightning down on any enemies in sight.

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musling riddles and new action-

puzzles. Of course

you'll find plenty of

new friends who

can help out. But

they'll need your help



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find a bride. • You'll also



bump into all kinds of new bad-

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three-quarter overhead view. • So get ready



for all kinds of new Nintendo

action and brain-bending

Square Soft adventure.

Remember, running and

jumping is a great start.

But this time around

you'll also



You want a new kind of Mario action? Try the Yoshi races. But here's a tip. If you don't hit the buttons to the beat, you'll get beat.



Whether you call it more action or more RPG, the fact is you'll have to use every trick in both books to beat these bad guys.

need plenty of

brains to finish.



Finding Frogfucious is a wise move if you want to know more about your future quest.





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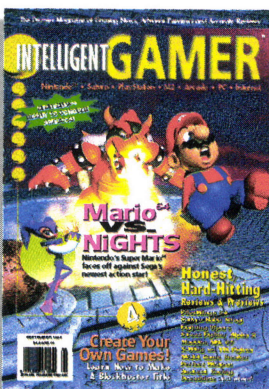
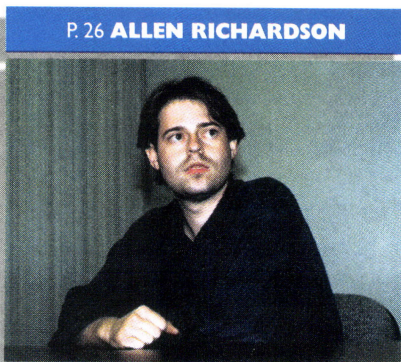
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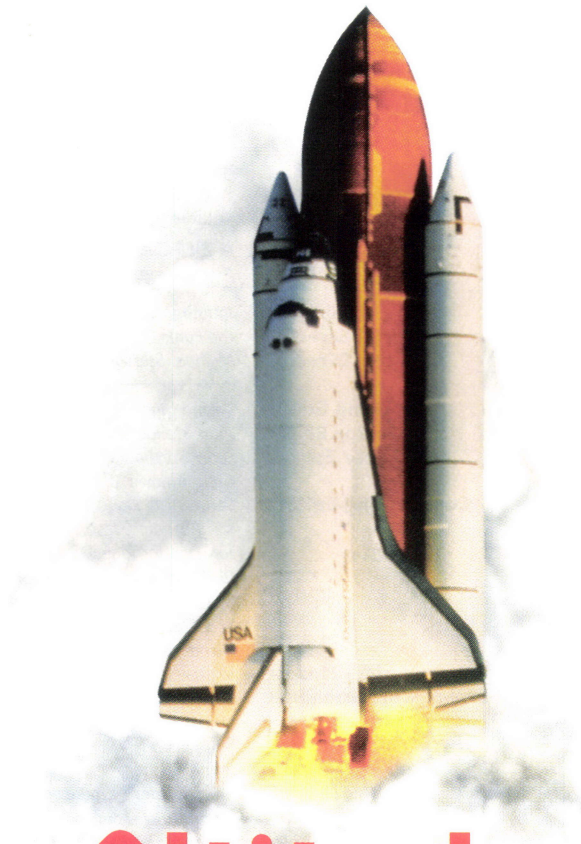
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Fasten your seatbelts... It's going to be a bumpy ride...



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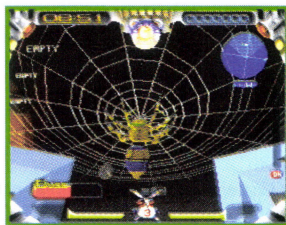
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Raising the Bar

Most of us remember our first exposure to a game that seemed like more than just some colored lights on a television or monitor, and whichever game that was for you, that was the point at which the graphics artists' on-screen symbols clicked in your mind. At some point, for sure, we've all watched or played some game that made us realize just how realistic electronic entertainment was getting, and for some of us (particularly those who have been gamers from the days of 8-Bit to 16-Bit to 32-Bit and beyond), there have been a number of those experiences. Every time this happens, our personal definitions of "good, better and best" shift to reflect our current perspectives, and of course, the same thing happens with reviewers for video game magazines.

In the past five years, we've witnessed the rise of Capcom's Street Fighter II in arcades and homes filled at the time with tens of mindless beat-'em-ups and similar shooters. Later, we watched the entry of Sega's high-speed 3-D polygon games Virtua Racing and Virtua Fighter into arcades and homes used to playing simulated 3-D racers and 2-D one-on-one fighter clones. No one expected tiny iD Software in Texas to revolutionize PC gaming with Doom when strategy simulations, RPGs, slow flight sims and flat Wolfenstein clones were selling just fine, and after that, we saw Nintendo unveil the fully rendered Donkey Kong Country into a marketplace accustomed to hand-drawn, flat-looking graphics.

Each of these titles raised the bar in either or both aesthetic and playability categories, forcing game players and reviewers to suddenly judge all competition by a different standard—no one could touch Street Fighter II, Doom, the Virtua titles or Donkey Kong Country for what they were doing at the time, and as their competitors rushed to get suitably impressive clones on the market, the original games' creators were busy making money on improved sequels. Moreover, each home game was initially available for only one system, so those interested in owning Street Fighter II and DKC had to own the SNES, Doom for PCs, Virtua Racing for the Genesis, and Virtua Fighter for the Saturn.

Given the recent release in Japan of Nintendo's Super Mario 64, the bar has been raised yet again—this time in the 3-D action game category—and to such an extent that no one will be able to directly compete with the SM64 experience come the end of September. All of this is not to say that a comparable 3-D action game such as Sega's NiGHTS, for example, cannot be deemed excellent—our review of the final version of Sega's latest and greatest should make that clear—but with more than 100 separate objectives and full freedom to explore and interact with complex (yet fun and interesting) 3-D worlds, Nintendo's game is simply in a different league from any of its current competitors. Only Eidos' and Core Design's Tomb Raider—a title that we're beginning to think might be a Saturn or PlayStation owner's "Mario for the rest of us" this year—approaches the level of interactivity in Nintendo's flagship game, and even then, we're not ready to say that Tomb Raider will approach Mario in the depth category. Nintendo has single-handedly proven that free 3-D movement can be fun while being challenging, and that's an incredible milestone for any company to have passed.

What does this mean to you as a reader? After playing any game that shatters a myth—whether it's Sega throwing fast polygons on screen in a 16-Bit cartridge game, iD proving that PC owners enjoy action games, Capcom reinventing the term "depth" or Nintendo redefining graphics or 3-D gameplay—*Intelligent Gamer* will adjust its perspective accordingly to deal with the new high-water marks set for each system (graphics and sounds) and genres (gameplay and lasting power) as a whole.

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Creative Director

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Joe Funk
Michael Stassus

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Senior Editor
Associate Editors

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IG's Mascot
Foreign Correspondent

Senior Art Director
Art Director
Production

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Marc Camron, Production Director
John Born, Production Coordinator
Dave McCracken, Production Mgr.
Jennifer Whitesides, Mng. Copy Editor
Jo-El Damen, Dan Peluso, Copy Eds.
Mike Darling, Ad Coordinator

Advertising

Eisenberg Communications Group, Inc.
Woodland Hills, CA 91364
(818) 712-9400
ig@eisenberg.com
Jeffrey Eisenberg,
Pres./National Advertising Director
Jon Yoffie, V.P. Sales Manager
Marc Callison, Account Executive
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with some
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Your source for great sports.

EIDOS
INTERACTIVE

I live in Brazil and I'd like to know how can I regularly find your magazine around here. Thanks a lot!

**Reinaldo Normand
Rua Sinal de Sá, Brazil**

Intelligent Gamer is very hard to find in Europe, and also in other countries (except the U.K.) it's very hard to buy an issue of the magazine. It would be great if you could sell it all around the world, because I'm not very proud of French video game magazines. IG offers me another point of view from the U.S. and English-speaking people in general. I receive [Japan's arcade magazine] Gamest at home, and it's totally different. I enjoy reading these two magazines, but especially Intelligent Gamer.

**Duperier Monterminod
Saint Alban Laysse, France**

[Ed.: We strongly advise all of our readers both inside and outside of the United States that they should most certainly call their favorite local stores and ask them to carry Intelligent Gamer. Though Ziff-Davis Publishing has an excellent distribution system, make certain that your favorite stores know that you want to find IG on their shelves.]

I am writing in regard to your comments about certain types of gamers on the bottom of page 25 in the July 1996 issue of IG. What is the purpose of attacking sports addicts because they are not into Mario and other cutesy-type games? Sure, Mario has exploration, but their target audience is definitely the 6 to 15-year-olds and not older gamers. Many gamers bought their systems for only certain types of games, such



Though Mario 64's exploration is paced for short romps and has the best gameplay ever seen in that genre, Rob Jones thinks that only Madden will do it for him.

as "only sports games," and I am one of those waiting for the next installment of Madden as opposed to Mario 64.

To play games such as Mario, you'll need tons of time to explore and examine and, as many people simply don't have time to spend in front of a video game, sports games provide that option. You can finish one in as little as 30 minutes and be completely satisfied or you can play over and over again for hours and still be satisfied, especially if you are playing against other human competition. Gaming is diverse and to slam on people who don't enjoy certain genres of games is foolish. Also, as to not having great experiences in 3-D worlds, that is extremely difficult because it's hard to keep gamers intrigued. When the action is not concentrated, people such as myself tend to lose interest in a game if I am just wandering around trying to find the next thing to do. Only trying to get to my objective means nothing, and games that have me searching everywhere for small details are annoying. You may enjoy Mario and I am sure millions of others will enjoy it as well, but saying I am not a sane-minded gamer because I wouldn't give Mario the time of day shows how narrow-minded the writer is.

For me and many others, Mario 64 is not a very good reason to buy a new console. I need more and right now, Nintendo just doesn't have it. I hope that in the future you're a little more careful with the words you use to describe a game.

**Rob Jones
Hempstead, NY**

[Ed.: Indeed our language was strong: "Something has to be said for gamers so jaded or narrowly focused that nothing with the Mario name could ever be impressive: There's nothing here that will change your mind. Go back to waiting for a new Madden to come out." While we acknowledge that we shouldn't have singled out Madden fans in IG as the world's only devoted and focused gamers, there was a reason we made the point so strongly. As you yourself admitted, you're not ready to give a new Mario game the time of day because it's supposedly cutesy and made for gamers younger than yourself, and

because you're looking for quick half-hour thrills that long-winded exploration games supposedly won't give you.

As you may discover if you decide—as per our advice—to step beyond your current conceptions of "games such as Mario" and give Super Mario 64 a try, this is not only a product that you can find "intriguing," "concentrated" and packed with a new "objective" every time you play, but it's one that lets you do something different and then save your game after each 15 or 30 minutes you sit down with it. Sometimes, we have to use strong language to make an important point, but we certainly agree that Madden fans such as yourself aren't the only people who will be surprised by the scope and pure excitement of Nintendo's new adventure. Next time, we'll choose our words more carefully.]



Looking to get your game idea turned into something other people can play? Allen Richardson explains how in IG's feature interview, beginning on page 26.

I have heard of some software companies accepting ideas and concepts for games from gamers. However, I have yet to come across a company that does this. I realize that certain copyright problems can arise from this and that some companies are leery about accepting ideas from avid gamers but there has to be some way to contact companies willing to at least look at or hear what intelligent gamers have to say. I currently have a completed story line for an RPG game of epic proportions that I would love to see become a reality. I lack the skills, however, to make my dream come true. Are there some companies willing to perhaps hear me out or give me a chance? Thanks for your help.

**Kabir Hemrajani
St. Thomas
U.S. Virgin Islands**

In September I will be entering my final year of high school, after which I hope to enter the electronic games industry. I was hoping to find a position somewhere as a games programmer. I have heard that DigiPen is the place to learn the trade, but do game companies feel this way as well? Do they hire graduating students out of DigiPen, and are there any other schools either in the United States, Canada or the U.K.? Any information you have on this topic would be very informative to me. Thanks,

**Andrew Craig
Cambridge, Ontario**

[Ed.: We receive quite a bit of mail from readers such as yourselves and thought that this issue's feature interview with Allen Richardson would answer your questions nicely. Please let us know what you thought of it.]

I would like to see more advanced information on companies that are planning to drop their products. I'm becoming more and more frustrated after spending hundreds on machines that fail before they get out of the gate.

Also, I always enjoy your honest reviews and previews. When I pick up a game that I have seen in your magazine and share the same sentiments you do, I always feel a bit better about my purchase.

**Neal Bauer
Portland, Oregon**

[Ed.: You shouldn't feel foolish after purchasing game systems that fail to live up to expectations, as sometimes hardware fails to catch on despite the presence of quality if not excellent software. We'll do our best to fulfill your request, though. (Whatta rhyme!)]



Send your comments, concepts and theories to:
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"ABSOLUTE GARBAGE."

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"PURE TRASH."

— *Ratweek*

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— *The Daily Urinal*

"IT STINKS."

— *The Sunday Compost*

"TWO THUMBS UP (OUR NOSES)."

— *Fungus & Mildew*



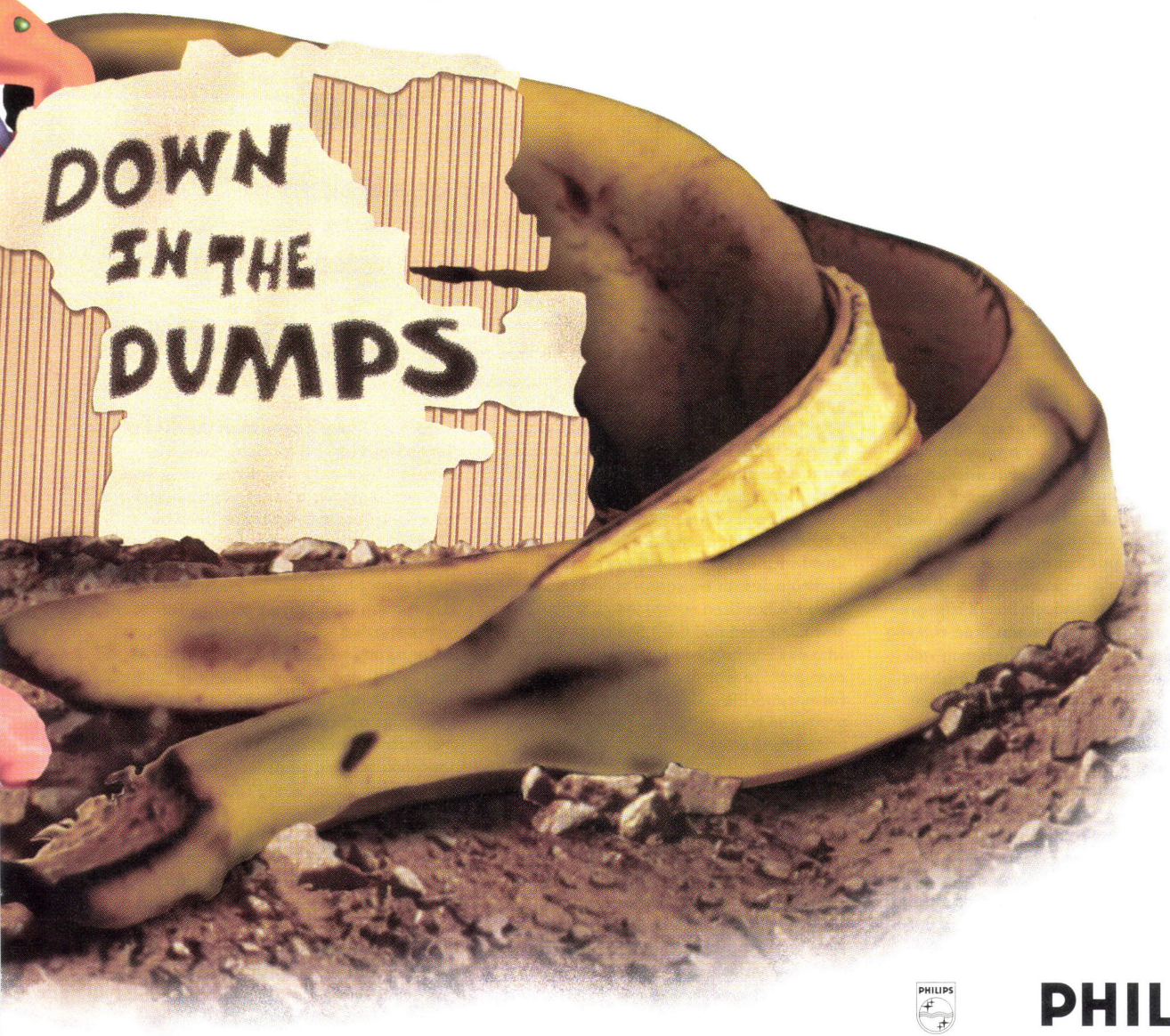
For PC and MAC CD-ROM and PSX.

"WE COULDN'T HAVE SAID IT BETTER OURSELVES."

— *The Blubs*

The Blubs, your average family of space aliens, are in a heap of trouble. They've crash-landed in a garbage dump and need you to help them put their ship back together so they can get back home to their less odorous planet.

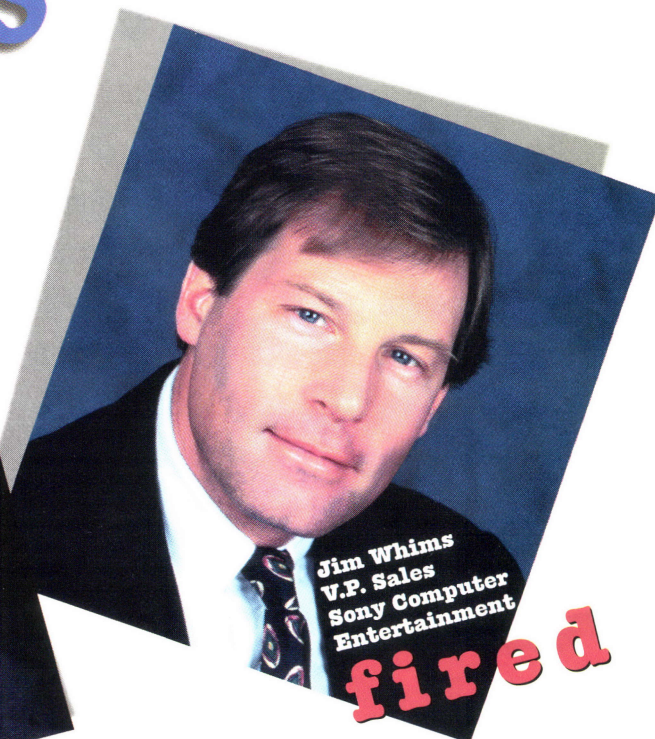
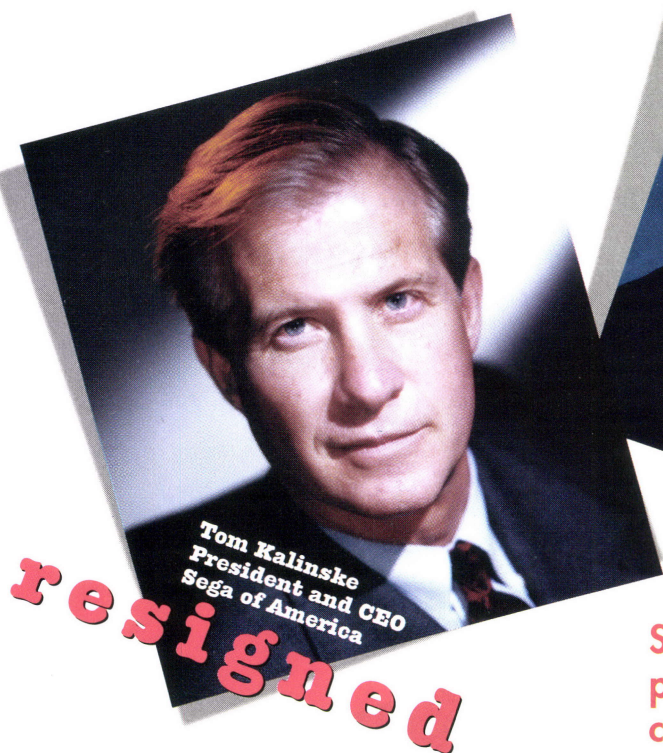
That is, before a gang of intergalactic bank robbers can get ahold of them. Find out why the critics are calling *Down in the Dumps* the funniest, best-looking and smelliest 3D graphic adventure game ever to (dis)grace a computer screen.



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Sega and Sony lose their most prominent spokesmen as restructuring changes the face of video gaming

Gaming War's Latest Victims

Friday, July 19 marked the close of one of the most tumultuous weeks in the history of the video games industry. One of Sony's well-known executives defected to Sega. Sega of America's top executive resigned, and both its Japanese president and American founder stepped down as Chairman and co-chairman of the board, respectively. If all of that hadn't seemed like enough, Sony's high-profile vice president of Sales was fired, capping off several days of drama which may well entirely change the way that video games are sold and marketed in North America.

Much of the activity, however, is focused in the occupational changes of three people, beginning with the resignation of Sega of America President and CEO Tom Kalinske. Having joined Sega following the launch of their 16-Bit Genesis game system, Kalinske is credited with pushing the company's established executives to bring the machine into the mass market by lowering its price and more aggressively advertising its superiority over the then-dominant Nintendo Entertainment System.

Presiding over Sega of America during an unprecedented period of growth for the company, Kalinske notably participated in the building of U.S. Sega development teams


and was involved in the promotion of products from the Genesis to the Game Gear, Sega-CD, 32X, Nomad and Saturn. During what anonymous IG sources claim to be a period of increasingly tight Japanese control over the Sega of America subsidiary, Kalinske sought alternative employment and found such an opportunity in Education Technologies, an education software company. He has been succeeded at Sega by new Chairman and CEO Shoichiro Irimajiri, who already holds an executive vice president position with Sega Entertainment. Former Atari President Ted Hoff has been promoted to a position as Sega's vice president of sales.

The unexpected firing of Jim Whims, Sony Computer Entertainment's vice president of sales, has been explained by the company as a move to replace a battle-ready leader with one who can preside carefully over a period of market dominance. Whims had come to be SCEA's primary executive spokesman following the departure of President Steve Race and the reassignment of subsequent President Martin Homlisch, and had followed in Race's footsteps to deliver the second undercutting PlayStation price announcement at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo. Whims has been

replaced by Jack Tretton.

Bernard Stolar's move from the head of third-party licensing for Sony Computer Entertainment to similar duties within Sega of America follows a series of complaints from Sony licensees regarding hardball PlayStation release tactics. Under Stolar, a large variety of third-party PlayStation titles faced outright rejection or extensive re-examination based on what many licensees' representatives—speaking under condition of anonymity—claim to be artificially created "bugs" and what were deemed "missing features." Examples of "bugs" included such complaints as arguments over in-game character statistics in sports titles and noticeable loading times for levels and/or characters such as Shang Tsung in *Mortal Kombat 3*.

Largely unrelated to the other changes, Sega Enterprises Ltd. Chairman and President Hayao Nakayama and company founder David Rosen have left the board of Sega of America. Though Nakayama and Rosen's departures from Sega of America's board are unlikely to change the day-to-day operations of the company, attractive seats on the company's board of directors have now been made vacant for use in hiring employees such as Stolar.



Psychologists say inside every
18 to 35-year-old male, there lies
a potential psychotic killer.



Independence Day Comes Late for Gamers

Canadian-based Radical Entertainment, developers of Virgin's recently successful 32-Bit NHL PowerPlay hockey game, has been enlisted to develop a video game version of the smash hit motion picture *Independence Day*. Fox Interactive will release the game, which is planned to be a combination of action, adventure and simulation elements, in PlayStation, Saturn and Windows 95 formats. After riding an incredible wave of prerelease hype, *Independence Day* shattered the \$100 million "blockbuster" mark in only six days, breaking *Jurassic Park*'s record of nine, but sadly, Fox Interactive's video game is still at least a year away. The company plans to release the game in late 1997 or early 1998.

Nintendo

Nintendo Lowers 16-Bit Hardware Price in Japan

After hinting prior to the Nintendo⁶⁴ launch that there would still be life left in the Super Famicom (SNES) platform after the release of their 64-Bit machine, Nintendo Co. Ltd announced in Japan that the price of the Super Famicom would drop dramatically as of Aug. 14, 1996. With a retail price of 25,000 yen (roughly \$250), the Super Famicom was priced identically in Japan to the Nintendo⁶⁴ and comparably to Sega's Saturn (20,000 yen) and Sony's PlayStation (24,800 yen), though discounting of the Super Famicom (14,000 yen) was far more aggressive than that on Sega and Sony's hardware. With the new suggested SFC retail price roughly paralleling their American SNES one, Nintendo hopes to sell over half a million SFCs through the fiscal year ending March 1997. Software prices, by comparison, are staying stable at between 7000 to 13,000 yen.



Hollinrake Photography

Excitement Builds for Sega Parks

After building a number of successful arcades and amusement centers in Japan and North America, Sega Enterprises started work on a number of special theme-park locations which constitute the culmination of the company's plans to become the 1990s version of the 1960s Disney. Construction has been underway at sites worldwide for several Sega parks, with completion nearly in sight for locations in Seattle, Washington and a suburb of Toronto, Canada.

Sega's 88,000+ square foot Joypolis park in Japan became a home to many of Sega's most expensive arcade attractions, including virtual-reality simulations and high-end 3-D driving games such as four- or eight-player Daytona USA, Sega Rally and Indy 500. Other locations such as Japan's Gigo, Indianapolis' Sega City and Sega Innoventions in Disney's EPCOT Center have become sites for displaying

Sega fighting and racing titles.

The new Sega City theme park occupies 27,000 square feet at The Meridian in Seattle, and Sega World locations in the Trocadero buildings (Piccadilly Circus, London) and Toronto will be fully themed

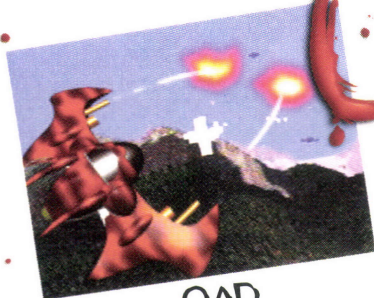
"futuractive" parks with roughly 100,000 square feet of games, interactive rides and virtual-reality simulations. With the opening date of Toronto's Sega World roughly four weeks away, a casting call for 150 employees drew a crowd of 7,000 applicants, many of whom came because they "wanted to play games."

Insiders note that the construction of Sega theme parks outside of Japan marks the satisfying conclusion of a long-time dream of Sega Enterprises

Chairman Hayao Nakayama, whose goal has been to expand the Sega name into a number of worldwide popular cultural entertainment media.



Hollinrake Photography



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Nihilist

TO PLAY?



Battle Slayer

Only the toughest survive in a tournament to find the most perfect specimen in all the colonized planets. So you better choose your character carefully. Battle Slayer's killer audio and multiple play modes are sure to satisfy even the most discriminating taste for blood.



Hard-Core Games.
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For PC CD-ROM.



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18 10 34

a potential psychotic killer.

IG Shorts: Sega Teams with Alias/Wavefront for 3-D Graphics: Sega Enterprises, Ltd. has announced that Alias/Wavefront's 3-D graphic development software is now an authorized tool for Saturn content creation. A|W's PowerAnimator 3D software can be used to preview and create high-quality in-game 3-D Saturn models on Silicon Graphics workstations, and Sega will distribute the necessary translation software to developers this summer.

■ **Electronic Arts Shows Triple Play at All-Star FanFest:** After developing one of IG's all-time favorite baseball games, EA Sports showcased that Triple Play 97 PlayStation title at Major League Baseball's All-Star FanFest in Philadelphia in early July. San Diego All-Star Tony Gwynn and former Philadelphia All-Star Gregg Jefferies went head-to-head on Triple Play at the FanFest, demonstrating the title's superb 3-D graphics and standard EA commitment to quality gameplay and design.

■ **Acclaim Reports net loss of \$3.97 million:** After announcing their departure from the 16-Bit cartridge publishing market in April, Acclaim Entertainment, Inc. announced a net loss of \$3.97 million for the third quarter ending May 31, 1996, with total revenues of \$62.6 million. Looking to the future, the company anticipates better days ahead based on increasing sales of 32-Bit hardware and alliances with software developers from Interplay to Sunsoft to Take 2 Interactive.

■ **Segasoft and GT Interactive Make Investments in Edutainment Companies:** Newly independent publishing and development house SegaSoft has invested in edutainment house Cloud 9, continuing the broadening of their corporate horizons beyond the creation of games for teenaged console players. GT Interactive, publisher of Williams and id Software titles from Mortal Kombat 3 to Doom and Hexen, acquired Putt-Putt and Fatty Bear developer Humongous Entertainment, figuratively diluting much of their previously bloody content with wholesome children's games.

■ **Microsoft and Nintendo Form Satellite Alliance:** Though the hardware they will use has not yet been specified, Nintendo has announced that it will work with Microsoft and the Nomura Research Institute to develop a Japanese online service that operates via satellite. Presently, Nintendo's Japanese Satellaview peripheral enables Super Famicom (SNES) owners to access games and information through similar means, but the impending venture will more likely result in a peripheral for the Nintendo64. The service is planned to begin in mid-1997.



HOT TOP 15

Top 15 Arcade Games



1. **Virtual On**
Sega
2. **Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo**
Capcom
3. **Bust-A-Move Again**
Taito
4. **Time Crisis**
Namco
5. **Rave Racer**
Namco
6. **Raiden DX**
Fabtek
7. **Marvel Super Heroes**
Capcom
8. **Soul Edge Version II**
Namco
9. **Gunblade NY**
Sega
10. **Tekken 2**
Namco
11. **Run & Gun 2**
Konami
12. **Street Fighter Alpha 2**
Capcom
13. **19XX**
Capcom
14. **Striker 1945**
Worldwide Video
15. **Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3**
Midway



Current Release Top 15

1. **Decathlete**
Sega/Saturn
2. **Quake** (Shareware)
id/PC
3. **International Track and Field**
Konami/PlayStation
4. **Ultimate MK3**
Williams/Saturn
5. **Baku Baku**
Sega/Saturn
6. **Bust-A-Move 2**
Acclaim/PlayStation
7. **NIGHTS**
Sega/Saturn
8. **Iron Storm**
Working Designs/Saturn
9. **Night Warriors: Darkstalkers' Revenge**
Capcom/Saturn
10. **Super Mario RPG**
Nintendo/Super NES
11. **The Legend of Oasis**
Sega/Saturn
12. **Darkstalkers: the Night Warriors**
Capcom/PlayStation
13. **Street Fighter Alpha**
Capcom/PS & Saturn
14. **NBA Shoot Out**
Sony CE/PlayStation
15. **Panzer Dragoon Zwei**
Sega/Saturn

Most Wanted Top 15



1. **Super Mario 64**
Nintendo/Nintendo64
2. **Tetrisphere**
Nintendo/Nintendo64
3. **Street Fighter Alpha 2**
Capcom/PS & Saturn
4. **WipeOut XL**
Psygnosis/PlayStation
5. **PilotWings 64**
Nintendo/Nintendo64
6. **Tomb Raider**
Eidos/PS & Saturn
7. **Spider**
BMG Interactive/PS & Saturn
8. **Final Fantasy VII**
Square/PlayStation
9. **Dark Savior**
Sega/Saturn
10. **Tobal No. 1**
Square/PlayStation
11. **Fighting Vipers**
Sega/Saturn
12. **Daytona USA C.C. Edition**
Sega/Saturn
13. **Andretti Racing**
EA Sports/PlayStation
14. **Formula 1**
Psygnosis/PlayStation
15. **Sonic X-Treme**
Sega/Saturn

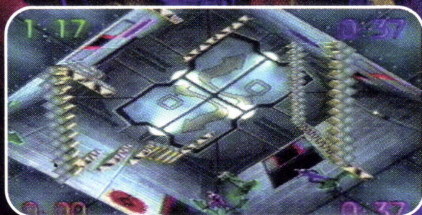
Japan Current Release Top 15



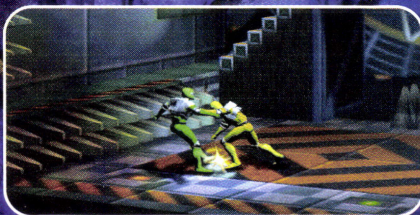
1. **NIGHTS**
Sega/Saturn
2. **Super Mario 64**
Nintendo/Nintendo64
3. **Hyper Olympics in Atlanta**
Konami/PlayStation
4. **Total NBA '96**
SCEI/PlayStation
5. **Bio Hazard**
Capcom/PlayStation
6. **Torico**
Sega/Saturn
7. **King of Fighters '95**
SNK/PlayStation
8. **Namco Museum Volume 3**
Namco/PS
9. **Tekken 2**
Namco/PlayStation
10. **Pocket Monster**
Nintendo/Game Boy
11. **Game Ware Vol. 2**
General Enter./Saturn
12. **King's Field III**
From Software/PlayStation
13. **PilotWings 64**
Nintendo/Nintendo64
14. **Nonomurabyouin no Hitobito**
Elf/Saturn
15. **Sankyo Fever**
TES Kenkyushitsu/PlayStation

In 2090
Having a Bomb
Strapped to You
is a Sport
[Want to Play?]

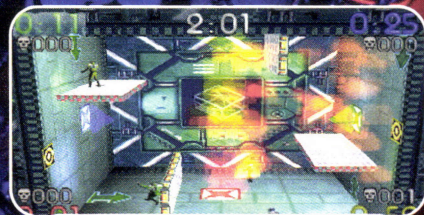
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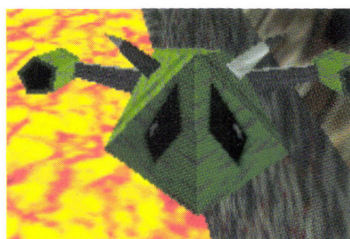


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That's because Righteous 3D has some of the most advanced features ever designed into a 3D accelerator. Like real-time interactive rendering, dual 64-bit memory architecture, advanced filtering and anti-aliasing,

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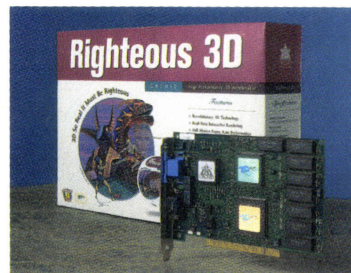
In fact, Righteous 3D is the first accelerator of its kind that can render complex 3D images at full-motion frame rates.

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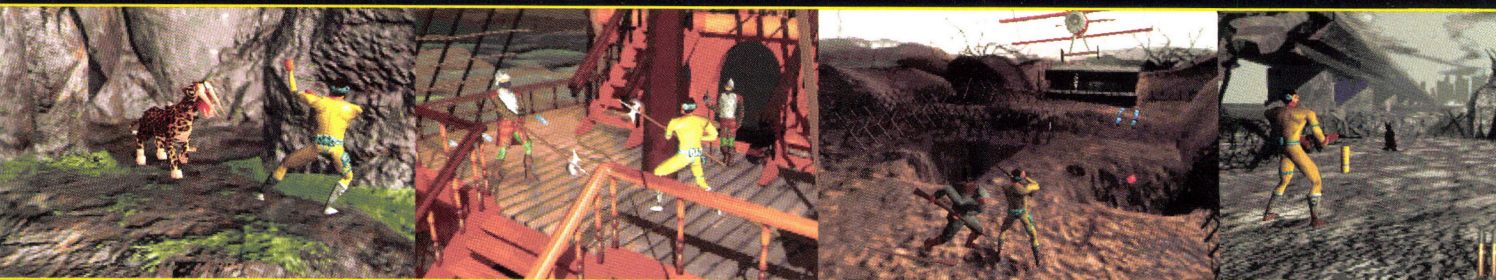
stick figures. Just sharp, clear images that move like nothing you've ever seen on a monitor. Which can make good games great. And great games truly awesome.

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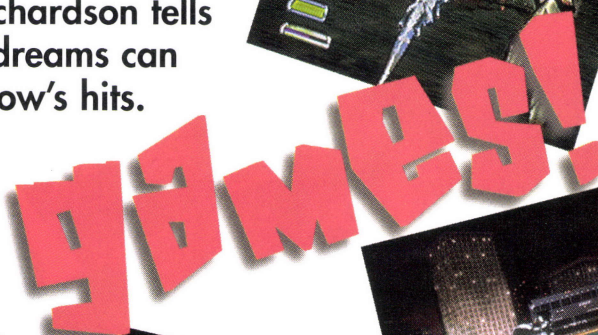
Every gamer has ideas for an exciting new game. Former Konami Product Development expert Allen Richardson tells you how your dreams can become tomorrow's hits.

Straight out of Northwestern University, Allen Richardson was hired on as an associate producer at Konami America in Illinois and came to oversee a number of the company's biggest products. After working on Contra Hard Corps, home ports of Lethal Enforcers 2, Tiny Toons: Acme All-Stars, Tiny Toons: Wacky Sports and Sparkster, Richardson came to head up projects from NBA: In the Zone to the upcoming Contra: Legacy of War. Today, having left Konami for Tiger Electronics, he is ready to spill the beans on how simple ideas can become blockbuster games.

Intelligent Gamer: Where does a game concept originate, generally speaking?

Allen Richardson: At a big company, the game concept can come from anywhere—it could come from Japan, it could come from outside, it can come from me—anywhere. If it comes from Japan, it's generally a finished concept, and they would bat it over to us to see if it fits in the U.S. lineup and whether or not it would sell. Obviously, there are many games that people go gonzo over in Japan that no one would buy in the U.S.

The concept could come from the U.S., too—if we thought that sports would sell well, we send that to Japan and push them to make soccer and basketball games, and we get back nearly finished titles. If it's a football game, and we know that Japan isn't big on

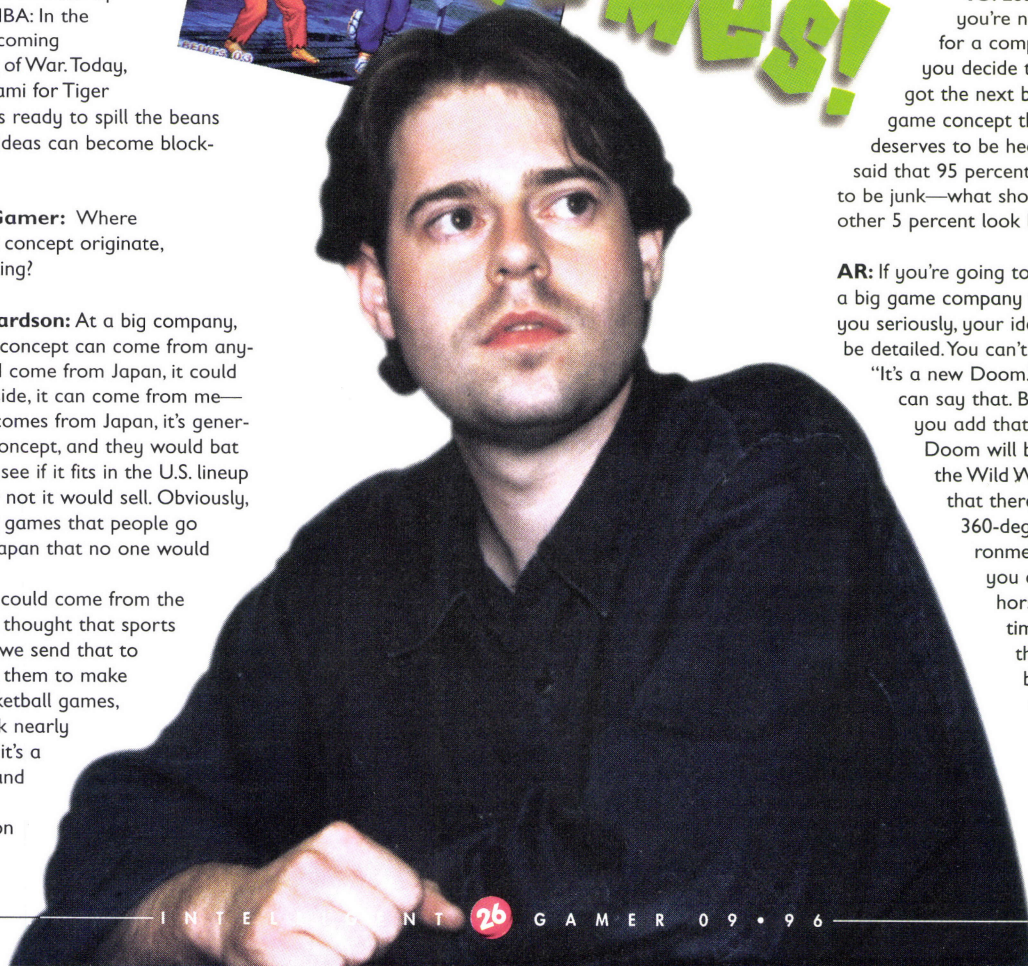


doing football games, we farm it out to some outside developer because they know the sport and have experience with it.

Very rarely do we get a finished product or a completed design that's unsolicited that we go with. There are companies that do this, but it's very difficult to push a completed design on to a company. Ninety-five percent of the stuff I saw was junk, but if it's a pure concept on paper and someone details it out and every level is designed and it's beautiful, and original and fresh and it's something we've never seen before, then okay, we might take it. But in the two years I worked at Konami, that never happened. It never got close.

IG: Let's say you're not working for a company and you decide that you've got the next brilliant game concept that deserves to be heard. You've said that 95 percent turn out to be junk—what should the other 5 percent look like?

AR: If you're going to hope that a big game company will take you seriously, your idea has to be detailed. You can't just say, "It's a new Doom." Anyone can say that. But when you add that this Doom will be set in the Wild West, and that there will be a 360-degree environment where you can ride horses and time travel, that's a little bit more descriptive than saying that you can run around



**"You have to go the extra mile
and make your idea fresh and new
and something that people haven't seen—
you can't just say,
"It's going to be another WipeOut..."**

in a maze and shoot things. You have to go the extra mile and make your idea fresh and new and something that people haven't seen—you can't just say, "This is going to be another WipeOut, another Loaded." Why would people want to buy your game when there already is another WipeOut or Loaded out there?

IG: What are the top things companies consider when choosing game concepts?

AR: Well, you look at what people like to play and go after it. Sit down and look at the marketplace, look at how much of the market share is in sports games, how much is action games, adventure games, RPGs and so on. As you notice with Square, they're breaking out of their great reputation for RPGs and going into other genres—as a consumer, if I think they can make a great fighting game, too, I'm going to want to take a look at it for sure.

IG: When there's a decision to make a Doom clone for the PlayStation, what sort of things get considered in making something similar so many years after the original?



AR: With a company, you take the team assigned to do it and find out what they want to do—they could be working on the game for anywhere between eight and 18 months. They're going to work on this game day and night, and they know what's on the market and don't want a cheap knockoff. They sit down for almost a month and brainstorm what would be cool and how to make it different, and they're betting that 12 months down the line that it will still be fresh.

IG: How does a game get made once you've agreed upon the concept?

AR: Basically, the producer and the team leader will work together and make a big flow chart: Here's today and here's the day we have to hit. They take everyone on the team and sit down to find out how long it would reasonably take to get these parts out. Inevitably the art will take the longest, but the programmer can't start until he has something to work with. Since you're maximizing your resources and don't want people sitting around for a day or an hour doing nothing, you set up milestones so that you know you have to see the early parts of the first level working after the first milestone, have the first level complete by the third milestone, all of the AI working by the fifth or sixth, etc.

IG: When there are unexpected delays in a game's release, where do they normally come from?

AR: A number of different sources. They had not planned for or adhered to a critical path that will insure proper completion of a development cycle at a deadline. Milestones start to fall behind, and if you don't have a

plan in place to allow for that, things start to back up. If you're trying to make Thanksgiving, the biggest sales weekend of the year, and you have a delay of a week, then you might as well delay it for a few weeks.

IG: Let's go from the other end of things—what does it feel like as a team leader when you have just worked on a game for a year, you push the game out the door, and all of a sudden some jerk from IG plays your game and gives you a tough time?

AR: To be quite honest, a lot of reviews didn't tell us stuff we didn't already know. A lot of times, it's like, sigh, "they caught it," and you wish that you'd been able to slip something by. If I had my ideal world, I would work on a game until it gets done and it's the best game that it could be, and we can put it out there. That's not the way it is; I've got marketing coming after me and I'm looking at deadlines I have to make for production, deadlines I have to make for Nintendo, Sony, Sega, deadlines for the Entertainment Software Ratings Board, and when it comes down to it, everyone has to make compromises. Some are little, some are big—again, the review itself really doesn't tell us anything we don't know.

Sometimes, I'll disagree with a review—some magazine reviewed Powerful Pro Baseball, Konami's Japanese baseball title, and they said they didn't see how it could be a good game even in Japan. But in Japan, it sold amazingly well. Then they reviewed Bottom of the Ninth—four stars—same gameplay, only thing different is the graphics, and you're wondering how could they go from such ends of the spectrum. Now if they don't like the Weeble-Wobble people, they should say that, but these guys said it was a bad game just because they didn't like the graphics.



**"...if it's a pure concept
on paper
...and it's beautiful and
original and fresh and
it's something we've never
seen before, then okay,
we might take it."**

IG: On the other side of the equation, what happens when you see an extremely positive review of a game that you think has been botched horribly?



AR: (laughing) Hey, then I'm not going to argue with you—if you want to give it an A, that's fine.

IG: How did you get your job?

AR: I had a gamer's background. So I'm about to graduate from college and I'm looking through the paper for a job, and I see this position that's opening up at Konami for an associate producer...and I think, hey, I know them, they made Contra, they made Castlevania. I did a little background checking and tried to find out what Konami was all about; I picked up the magazines, like EGM, just so I could mention the buzz words at the time, such as Project Reality and Neptune or whatever, and I went in there very enthusiastically and I had the right education. From the time I first interviewed to the end of my third interview, it was about two weeks. At the time, the interview was very simple: "Why should we hire you?" And I explained the new ideas that I could bring to the company.

IG: And they gave you a job as an associate producer right out of the gate? Doesn't that strike you as odd today?

AR: Extremely odd, absolutely. Many companies promote from within; they'll take the beta testers, maybe go to customer service, and build them up. Often, a lot of it is just dumb luck; if you're in the right place at the right time, and you have the right background, bingo, you

can be in. The video game industry is small and incestuous right now; once you break in, you could seriously have a job for the rest of your life within the industry. You may not be with the same company, but once you get the experience, it snowballs.

IG: How should a person go about getting a job making games?

AR: Reduce your luck factor. Leverage yourself, get the skills, take classes that are going to relate to what you want to do in the industry. I can't stress enough right now the importance of being a programmer, even if you want to be a designer or a producer. At least you'll have an idea of how long the code will take to program. When you have a technical background, you'll know how to use the tools to make a blockbuster like Tekken 2. If you want to be a game writer, read a book, learn how a story is put together. If you want to make sports games, play real sports, watch real sports on TV, see what makes them appeal to such a wide audience, and then take your experiences and put them in a video game. You're not going to know what real life is like if all you do is play video games. So though you have to have the enthusiasm and love

video games, you have to have other interests.

There is really no formal education involved in making video games. Canada has Digipen, which is partially sponsored by Nintendo—a great school, underrated, highly competitive and you don't necessarily have to work for Nintendo afterward. If you have the time, the money and the inclination, you're virtually guaranteed a position in the industry. By the same token, I've worked with producers who have only been through high school.

Finally, get your name out to different companies, and get to know online administrators and people in customer service—they're paid to talk with you. Don't underestimate these guys. Seriously, if you're really a good guy and know what you're talking about, word will get around. If a job is about to open up, or someone is about to get axed, these guys are often the first to know about it, and you can be at least in on it. There is, however, a fine line between being persistent and obnoxious, so don't force things with these people—relationships take time to build, and trying to make things happen too quickly shows impatience and desperation, things that big companies cannot afford.



So you still want to be a game designer? Here are a few names and Web addresses you should know....

Acclaim
www.acclaimnation.com

Activision
www.activision.com

Capcom
www.capcom.com

Electronic Arts
www.ea.com

Konami
www.konami.com

LucasArts
www.lucasarts.com

Microsoft
www.microsoft.com

Nintendo
www.nintendo.com

Sega
www.sega.com

Sony
www.sepc.sony.com/
SCEA

T*HQ
www.thq.com

Williams
www.williamsentertainment.com



"You're not going to know what real life is like if all you do is play video games, so though you have to have the enthusiasm and love video games, you have to have other interests."

—Allen Richardson

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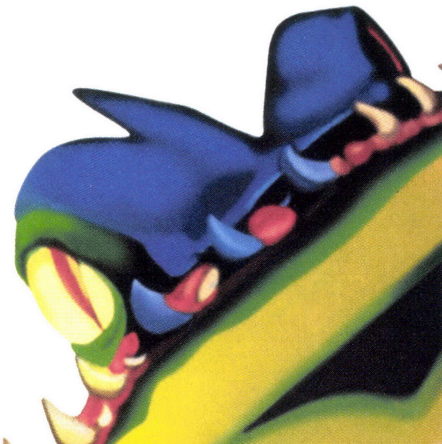
into dreams...

COMING AUGUST

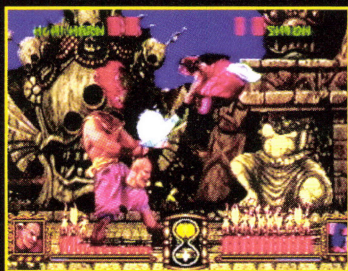
ONLY ON



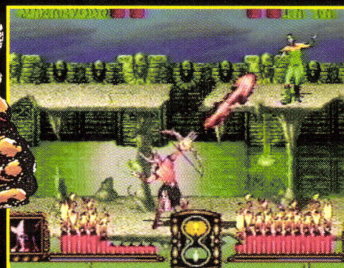
SEGA SATURN[™]



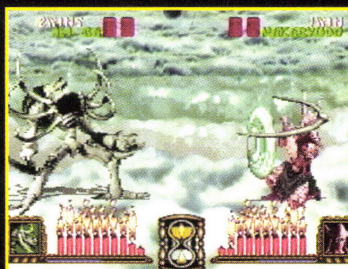
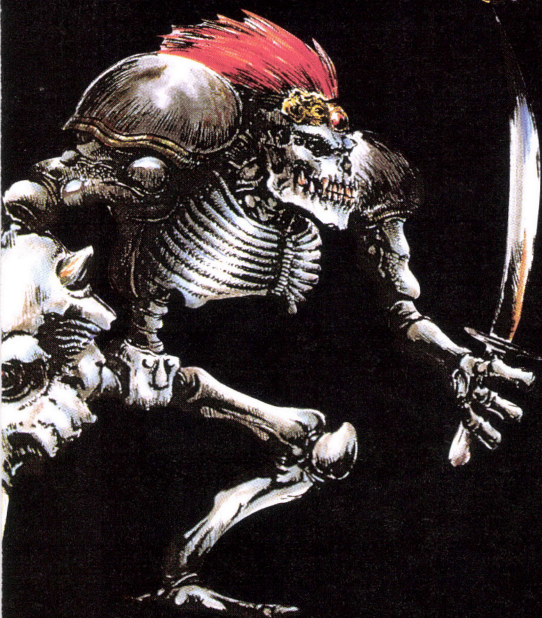
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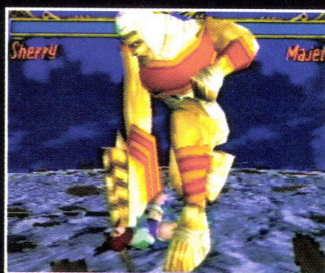
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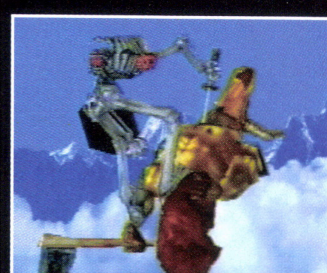
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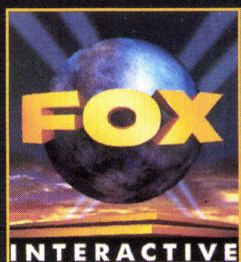


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The Nintendo⁶⁴ Arrives in Japan

Over half a million machines sell out immediately...

▼ A series of posters on Tokyo streets heralded the coming of the Nintendo⁶⁴ prior to the launch, but the announcement of only three titles limited interest mainly to Nintendo fans.



The Nintendo⁶⁴ ("N64") was finally released in Japan on June 23 after a number of considerable delays – targeted for fall '95, the date slipped to April '96 and finally at the end of June, the machine was available in stores. Everyone wondered whether the machine would be a success or just another Virtual Boy, but the talk on the streets before the launch was that of muted excitement.

Most stores in the Tokyo area were ready for the launch of the N64, but were only selling machines and software via pre-orders (a.k.a. "reservations"). The first batch that Nintendo shipped was about 300,000 units, and a Nintendo representative stated that they wanted to ship 500,000 units in June and another 500,000 units in both July and August – for every system, they wanted one copy of Mario to be available, as well. Ultimately, Nintendo wanted or expected the total units shipped to be over 3 million by next March, which is an ambitious number considering how long other companies have taken to reach that sort of number.

Some managers in the Akihabara area were somewhat surprised by the numbers that Nintendo was talking about when there had been no announcement of future titles. The three titles at launch were reasonable to keep people happy in late June, but additional titles will keep up the excitement over the machine.

There were only two stores in Tokyo that had units available for people who had no reservation, both of them located in Akihabara. At 2 a.m. on June 23, there was a group of roughly 30 people sitting out in front waiting for the store to open up so that they could get a hold of the brand-new system—a disappointing number of people



Small crowds of people began to form lines for Nintendo⁶⁴ hardware the evening before the launch took place; some even brought reading materials.

considering the craze when the Super Famicom first hit the market, but a testament to Nintendo's improved distribution system through convenience stores such as Lawson's and 7-11.

The first people in line had been sitting there since 8 p.m., the time at which the store closed the previous evening. After that, one of the store managers came out and told them not to line up and go home, saying that there would be enough for them when they came back in the morning. This, of course, did not deter the people lining up, and they were back in front of the store after two hours.

The store opened up an hour early (9a.m.) to sell their allocated 300 units, and the crowd grew as more people appeared at 5a.m. when the trains started running again. After buying their unit, they all rushed home to try to be one of the first to play the new machine, many not realizing that others had already got their machine at midnight. Lawson's stores had been allocated five units for reservation, and since convenience stores are open 24 hours, people picked up their N64s at midnight.

As expected, the N64 did sell out of its first shipment and a second waiting list was started. The second shipment of 200,000 units also sold out when it hit stores five days later. Though reserved systems were dominant, some stores did make machines available without reservations at a price: A 30-percent mark-up for the N64 and Mario package. Some specialty video game stores sold the system at a slight discount. It was as if store owners could not come to a consensus about whether the machine would be a success or not.

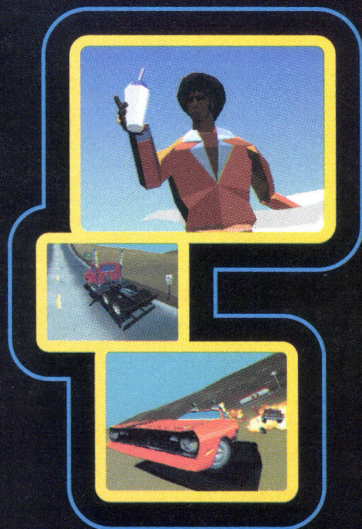
As of today, several new N64 titles have been officially announced by Nintendo, but only one third-party game (Cu-On-Pa, a puzzler) has been announced for September release. People have often complained that Japan always gets games first, but with the N64, the reverse may be true—so few Japanese companies are experts on the Silicon Graphic workstations that power N64 development.

Nintendo's new ones are F-Zero 64 and Yoshi's Island 64. Can life get better?



▲ The Japanese N64 box and its three launch titles. (Counter-clockwise, from left: Seta's Saikyo Habu Shogi, Nintendo and Paradigm's PilotWings 64, and Nintendo's Super Mario 64.)

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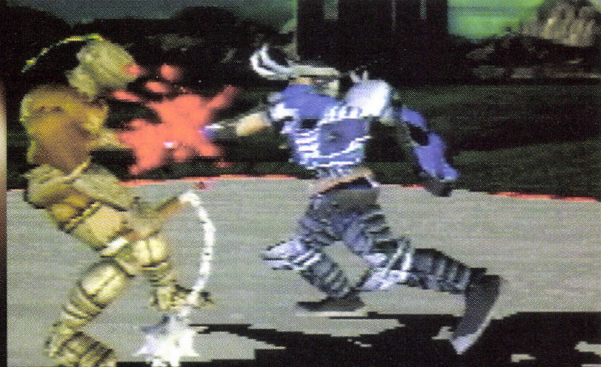
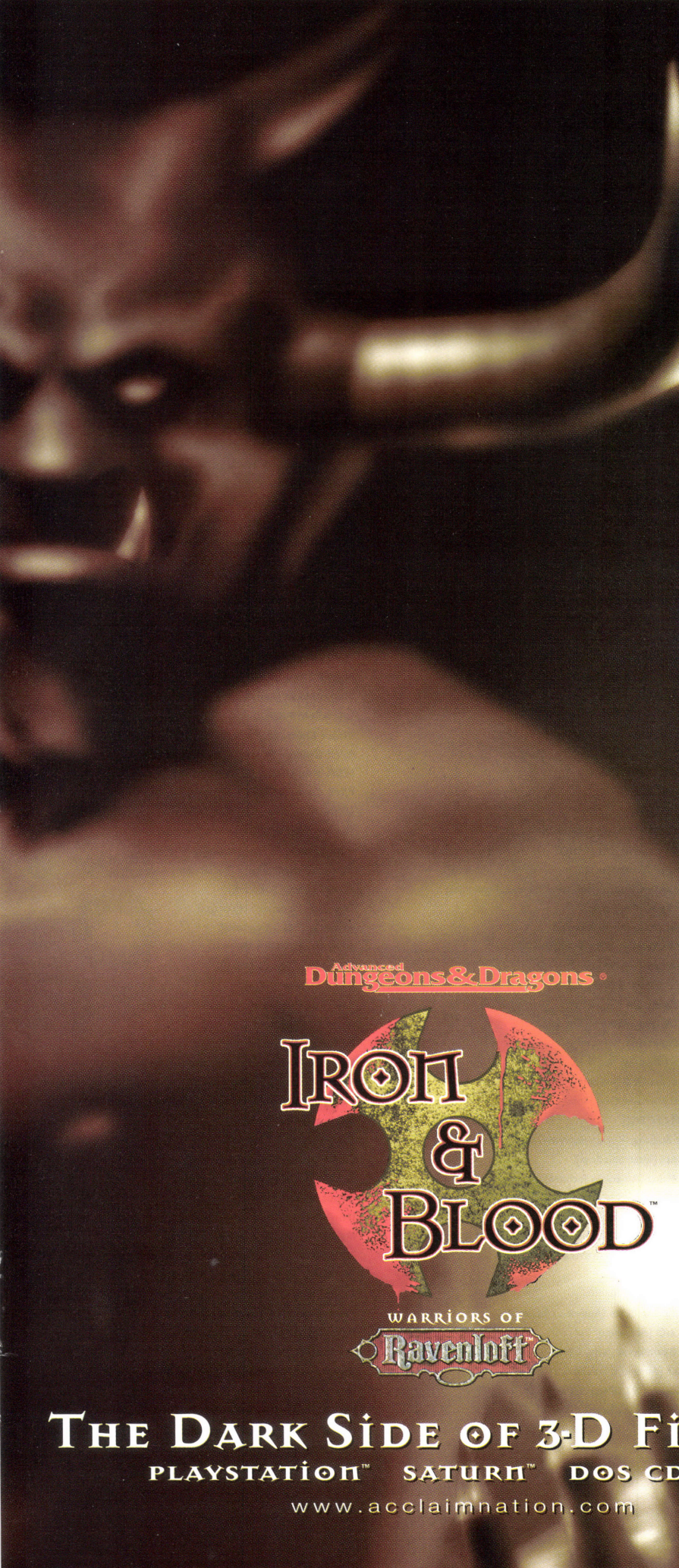
OR BEASTS & BEHEMOTHS.

IS THAT A BABE
IN LEOTARDS
GIVING YOU AN
AEROBICS WORKOUT...

OR IS IT A FLAMING FIEND
FRESH FROM THE PIT
WHO WANTS HIS CLAWS
IN YOUR CHARRED CORPSE?



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SEPTEMBER

Body Harvest [Nintendo]
Cruis'n USA [Nintendo]
PilotWings 64 [Nintendo]
Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire [Nintendo]
Super Mario 64 [Nintendo]
Tetrisphere [Nintendo]
4TH QUARTER 1996
Blast Corps [Nintendo]
Buggie Boogie [Nintendo]
DOOM 64 [Williams]
FIFA International Soccer 64 [Electronic Arts]
GoldenEye 007 [Nintendo]
Ken Griffey Jr. Baseball [Nintendo]
Killer Instinct 64 [Nintendo]
Kirby's Air Ride [Nintendo]
Mortal Kombat Trilogy [Williams]
NBA Hang Time [GT Interactive]
NHL Open Ice [GT Interactive]
Robotech: Crystal Dreams [Gameltek]
Super Mario Kart R [Nintendo]
Top Gear Rally [Kemco]

Top Gun: A New Adventure [Spectrum Holobyte]
Turok: Dinosaur Hunter [Acclaim]
Ultra Descent [Interplay]
War Gods [Williams]
WaveRace 64 [Nintendo]
Wayne Gretzky Hockey [Williams]

ANNOUNCED TITLES

Alien Trilogy [Acclaim]
Bomberman 64 [Hudson]*
Creator [Nintendo]*
Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball [Acclaim]
Freak Boy [Virgin Interactive]
Hexen 64 [GT Interactive]*
Mission: Impossible [Ocean]
Monster Dunk [Mindscape]
POD [Ubi Soft]
Prey [Apogee]
Quake 64 [GT Interactive]*
Red Baron [Sierra On-line]
Robotron X [Williams]
Silicon Valley [BMG Interactive]*
Soul Storm [Virtual Hollywood]
StarFox 64 [Nintendo]
Tarzan [Gameltek]
The Legend of Zelda 64 [Nintendo-64DD]
Ultra Combat [GT Interactive]*
Ultra Descent [Interplay]*

RECENT RELEASES

Adidas Power Soccer [Psygnosis]
Aquanaut's Holiday [Sony CEA]
Big Bass World Champ [HOT-B]
Beyond the Beyond [Sony CEA]
Bogey: Dead 6 [Sony CEA]
Carnage Heart [Sony CEA]
Cheesy [Ocean]
Chronicles of the Sword [Psygnosis]
Crime Wave [Eidos]
Impact Racing [JVC]
Independence Day [FOX Interactive]
International Track & Field [Konami]
Johnny Bazzookatone [Eidos]
Legacy of Kain [Crystal Dynamics]
MVP Baseball [Data East]
Project: Horned Owl [Sony CEA]
Raw Pursuit [Impact Racing]
Sentient [Psygnosis]
SimCity 2000: Special Edition [Maxis]
Star Winder [Mindscape]
Steel Harbinger [Mindscape]
Storm [American Softworks]
The Final Round [Konami]
Tops MVP Baseball '96 [Data East]
Ultimate MK3 [Williams]
Wetlands [New World]

AUGUST 1996

3-D Baseball [Crystal Dynamics]
Alone in the Dark II [T*HQ]
Bedlam [GT Interactive]
Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain [Crystal Dynamics]
Buster Bros [Capcom]
Darknet [American Softworks]
Die Hard Trilogy [FOX Interactive]
Grand Slam '96 [Virgin]
Jumping Flash! 2 [Sony CEA]
Major Damage [Capcom]
Marvel Super Heroes [Capcom]
Myst [Psygnosis]
Namco Museum Vol. 1 [Namco]
Project Overkill [Konami]
Project: Horned Owl [Sony CE]
Robo Pit [T*HQ]
Rocket Jockey [Rocket Science Games]
Shredfest [Electronic Arts]
Strike Point [American Technos]
Team 57 Goman [Coconuts]
Tecmo Golf [Tecmo]
The Adventures of Lomax in Lemmingsland [Psygnosis]*
Time Commando [Activision]
VR Pool [Interplay]

SEPTEMBER 1996

4X4 Gears & Guts [American Softworks]
Bubsy 3-D [Accolade]
Crash Bandicoot [Sony CEA]
Darknet [American Softworks]
FIFA Soccer '97 [Electronic Arts]
Final DOOM [Williams]

Fox Hunt [Capcom]
Lethal Enforcers 1&2 [Konami]
Madden NFL 97 [Electronic Arts]
Mortal Kombat Trilogy [Williams]
MVP College Football '96 [Data East]
Namco Museum Vol. 2 [Namco]
NASCAR [Sierra On-Line]
Power Pinball [Bandai Multimedia]
Powerslave [Playmates]
Revelations [Atlus]
Ridge Racer Revolution [Namco]
Soviet Strike [Electronic Arts]
Syndicate Wars [Electronic Arts]
Tecmo Stackers [Tecmo]
Tecmo Super Bowl [Tecmo]
Tekken 2 [Namco]
Time Commando [Activision]
Viper [Ocean]
Werewolf: The Apocalypse [Capcom]
World Martial Arts Corp. [Bandai Multimedia]

OCTOBER 1996

BallBlazer [LucasArts]
Black Dawn [Virgin]
Command & Conquer [Virgin]
Cyber Gladiators [Sierra On-Line]
Deadly Skies [JVC]
Destruction Derby 2 [Psygnosis]
Dream Team Basketball [Eidos]
Grid Runner [Virgin]
Herc's Adventures [LucasArts]
Hyper 3-D Pinball [Virgin]
HyperBlade [Activision]
Incredible Hulk [Eidos]
Major Damage [Capcom]
MVP College Football '96 [Data East]
NBA Hang Time [GT Interactive]
NHL Open Ice [GT Interactive]
Oblivion [Eidos]
Onside Soccer II [American Technos]
Rebel Moon [GT Interactive]
Street Fighter Alpha 2 [Capcom]
Street Racer [UBI Soft]
Top Gun [Spectrum Holobyte]
WipeOut XL [Psygnosis]
4TH QUARTER 1996
2 Xtreme [Sony CEA]
Alien Striker [Atlus]
Andretti Racing '97 [Electronic Arts]
Area 51 [Williams]
Athanor [Psygnosis]
Batman Forever: The Arcade Game [Konami]
Battlestations [Electronic Arts]
Blast Chamber [Activision]
Broken Helix [Konami]
Burning Road [Playmates]
Castle of the Damned [Tecmo]
Contra: Legacy of War [Konami]
Crypt Killer [Konami]
Dark Forces [LucasArts]
Deathdrome [Viacom New Media]
Discworld II: Missing Presumed...!? [Psygnosis]
Disruptor [Universal Interactive]
Epidemic [Sony CEA]
Fade to Black [Electronic Arts]
Fatal Fury Real Bout [Sony CE]
Floating Runner [T*HQ]
Great Balls of Fire [Jerry Lee Lewis]
Hexen [GT Interactive]
Iron & Blood: Ravenloft [Acclaim]
Island of Dr. Moreau [Psygnosis]
Jack Nicklaus Golf [Accolade]
Jet Moto [Sony CEA]

* - Working Title

new releases

K-1 Super Kick Boxer [T*HQ]
King's Field II [Ascii]
Legends Football '97 [Accolade]
Mega Man 8 [Capcom]
Mega Man X4 [Capcom]
Mickey Thompson Virt Moto X [Playmates]
Monster Rancher [Tecmo]
Monster Truck Rally [Psygnosis]
MTV's Aeon Flux [Viacom New Media]
MTV's Slamscape [Viacom New Media]
NBA Jam Extreme [Acclaim]
NBA In The Zone 2 [Konami]
NCAA GameBreaker [Sony CEA]
Near Death [Atlus]
NFL Full Contact [Konami]
NFL GameDay '97 [Sony CEA]
NHL '97 [Electronic Arts]
NHL Face Off '97 [Sony CEA]
Pandemonium [Crystal Dynamics]
Peak Performance [Atlus]
Perfect Weapon [American Softworks]
PGA Tour '97 [Electronic Arts]
Power Pigs [Titus]
Project Overkill [Konami]
Rebel Assault II [LucasArts]
Reloaded [Interplay]
Revelations: Persona [Atlus]
Robotron X [Williams]
Samurai Shodown III: Blades of Blood [Sony CEA]
Shining Sword [American Laser Games]
Soul Edge [Namco]
Spawn [Sony CEA]
Speed King [Konami]
Spot Goes to Hollywood [Virgin]
Star Control III [Accolade]
Star Gladiator [Capcom]
Suikoden [Konami]
Tecmo Thoroughbred Derby [Tecmo]
The City of Lost Children [Psygnosis]
The Divide: Enemies Within [Viacom New Media]
The King of Fighters 95 [Sony CEA]
Tobal No. 1 [Sony CEA]
Tomb Raider [Eidos]
Tunnel B-1 [Sony CEA]
Twisted Metal 2: World Tour [Sony CEA]
War Gods [Williams]
WWF: In Your House [Acclaim]
ANNOUNCED TITLES
Air Combat 2 [Namco]*
Aliens vs. Predator [FOX Interactive]
Breath of Fire III [Capcom]
Castlevania: The Bloodletting [Konami]
Final Fantasy IV [Square]
Ghost in the Shell [T*HQ]
International Vegetable Mosh Pit [GarageWorks]
Kumite: The Fighter's Edge [Konami]
Mega Man Neo [Capcom]
Namco Museum Vol. 3 [Namco]
One [Metallica]
Pitfall 3-D [Activision]
Quake [GT Interactive]
Raven Project [Mindscape]
Rayman II [UBI Soft]
Scorchers [Scavenger]
Sentient [Psygnosis]
Spider [BMG Interactive]
Surreal [American Softworks]
Tenka [Psygnosis]*
Warhammer [Mindscape]
World Championship Wrestling [T*HQ]
Zero Divide 2 [ZOOM]
Zork: Nemesis [Activision]



RECENT RELEASES

Amok [GT Interactive]
Destruction Derby [Sega of America]
Golden Axe: The Duel [Sega of America]
Impact Racing [JVC]
Independence Day [FOX Interactive]
Johnny Bazoorkatone [Eidos]
Raw Pursuit [JVC]
Scorchers [GT Interactive]
Shockwave Assault [Electronic Arts]
The Legend of Oasis [Sega of America]
Topps MVP Baseball '96 [Data East]
Varuna's Forces [JVC]

AUGUST 1996

3-D Baseball [Crystal Dynamics]
Alone in the Dark II [T*HQ]
Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain [Crystal Dynamics]
Buster Bros. Collection [Capcom]
Catfight [Atlantean Interactive]
Die Hard Trilogy [FOX Interactive]
Grand Slam '96 [Virgin]
Hyper 3-D Pinball [Virgin]
Major Damage [Capcom]
Marvel Super Heroes [Capcom]
NHL Open Ice [GT Interactive]
NiGHTS (Into Dreams...) [Sega of America]
Robo Pit [T*HQ]
Storm [American Softworks]
Water World [Ocean]

SEPTEMBER 1996

4X4 Gears & Guts [American Softworks]
Arcade's Greatest Hits [Williams]
Bubsy 3-D [Accolade]
Darknet [American Softworks]
Dark Rift [Vic Tokai]
Dead or Alive [Tecmo]
Dragon Force [Working Designs]
FIFA Soccer '97 [EA Sports]
Fox Hunt [Capcom]
Heart of Darkness [Virgin]
Highway 2000 [Natsumi]
Iron & Blood [Take 2]
Jewels of the Oracle [Sun Soft]
Lethal Enforcers 1&2 [Konami]
Madden NFL 97 [Electronic Arts]
MVP College Football '96 [Data East]
NFL Legends Football '97 [Accolade]
PGA Tour '97 [Electronic Arts]
Powerslave [Playmates]
Rayman 2 [UBI Soft]
Space Hulk [Electronic Arts]
S.T.O.R.M. [American Softworks]
Tecmo Stackers [Tecmo]
Tecmo Super Bowl [Tecmo]
Werewolf: The Apocalypse [Capcom]
X-Men 3-D [Saturn]

OCTOBER 1996

Area 51 [Williams]

Big Bass World Champ [HOT-B]
Blast Chamber [Activision]
Command & Conquer [Virgin]
Deadly Skies [JVC]
Doom [GT Interactive]
Dream Team Basketball [Eidos]
Grand Theft Auto [BMG Interactive]
Grid Runner [Virgin]
Heart of Darkness [Virgin]
Herc's Adventures [LucasArts]
Hyper 3-D Pinball [Virgin]
HyperBlade [Activision]
Incredible Hulk [Eidos]
Magic Knight Rayearth [Working Designs]
Marvel Super Heroes [Capcom]
Natsume Pinball [Natsume]
Oblivion [Eidos]
Street Racer [UBI Soft]
Paco Lopez's Super Big-Wheel Wars [GarageWorks]

4TH QUARTER 1996

Area 51 [Williams]
Armed [Interplay]
Battlestations [Electronic Arts]
Broken Helix [Konami]
Bubsy 3D [Accolade]
Bug Too! [Sega of America]
Contra: Legacy of War [Konami]
Crypt Killer [Konami]
Daytona USA: Championship Circuit Edition [Sega of America]
Deathdrome [Viacom New Media]
Descent [Interplay]
Fighting Vipers [Sega of America]
Jack Nicklaus Golf [Accolade]
Legends Football '97 [Accolade]
Loaded [Interplay]
Manx TT: Super Bike [Sega of America]
Major Man 8 [Capcom]
Mega Man X4 [Capcom]
MLBPA Bottom of the 9th [Konami]
Mr. Bones [Sega of America]
NFL '97 [Sega of America]
NFL Full Contact [Konami]
NHL '97 [Electronic Arts]
Policenauts [Konami]
Project Overkill [Konami]
Shredfest [Electronic Arts]
Sonic X-Treme [Sega of America]
Soviet Strike [Electronic Arts]
Spot Goes to Hollywood [Virgin]
Street Fighter Alpha 2 [Capcom]
The Lost Vikings 2 [Interplay]
The Sacred Pools [Sega of America]
Three Dirty Dwarves [Sega of America]
Tomb Raider [Eidos Interactive]
Virtua Cop 2 [Sega of America]
Virtual On: Cyber Troopers [Sega of America]
VR Basketball '96 [Interplay]
VR Football '96 [Interplay]
Worldwide Soccer II [Sega of America]

ANNOUNCED TITLES

Castlevania: The Bloodletting [Konami]
Criticom 2 [Vic Tokai]
DOOM [GT Interactive]
Hard Boiled [GTE]
Hexen [GT Interactive]
Kumite: The Fighter's Edge [Konami]
LUNAR: Director's Cut [Working Designs]
Rage of the Love Panda [SaitoVision]
Revelations: Devil Summoner [Atlus]
Tempest 2000 [Interplay]
Tetris Plus [Jaleco]
TNN Outdoors Bass Tournament '97 [American Softworks]

This list is compiled from various sources including company releases and retail store guides. As such, all titles and dates are subject to change. Have a great day. No, really, please do.

You like Kirby?

Have S'MORE.





Get ready for a **smorgasbord of Kirby action.**

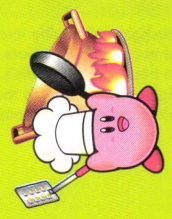
Kirby Super Star.TM* Eight tasty games in one! And this time the softie has an edge: Now he not only eats his enemies, he can take their powers (23 to be exact).

In this world, **you are who you eat.** Chow down on a ninja



and Kirby goes kung-fu fighting! He can even **hock up** the bad guys

and use them as helpers. So prepare yourself. 'Cause this time, the marshmallow's doing the roasting.



This Kirby may carry a wand, but he ain't no fairy godmother.



Swords, bombs, boomerangs, hammers. This is some serious marshmallow carnage!



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▶ Street Fighter Alpha 2 is what the original Street Fighter Alpha should have been: A multitude of playable characters, highly animated backgrounds and a higher level of challenge are all intact.

Street Fighter Alpha 2

Capcom prepares to bring their latest arcade masterpiece to home systems

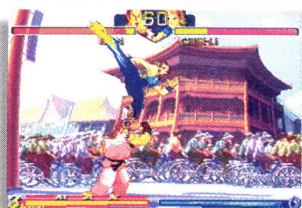
Publisher: Capcom

Platform: Saturn/PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Capcom

Release: October 1996

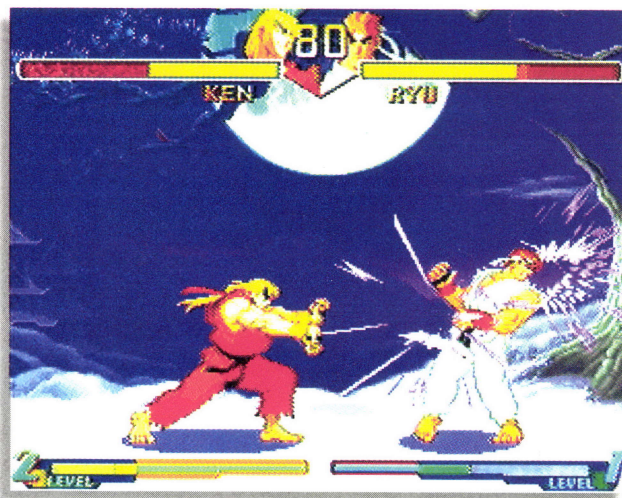


▶ Background quality exceeds that of even Night Warriors, as shown in these shots. Charlie's huge jet fighter and Chun-Li's thousands of bicyclists are just a sampling...

Most Street Fighter purists will tell you that their favorite Street Fighter games are either Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting or Super Street Fighter II Turbo. Both of these games were not only faster than their predecessors, but also featured relatively balanced characters and emphasized offense and positional play as the key to winning. It's very hard to design an offensively oriented fighting game; the failure of Killer Instinct and Mortal Kombat to encourage aggressive play despite their unique takes on the fighting game genre are examples of this.

When the original Street Fighter Alpha hit the arcades, many were initially wowed by its multitiered super combo system, along with the addition of chain combos and Alpha counters. But first impressions only go so far, and when it was realized that Alpha 1 possessed flaws that made themselves apparent at high levels of skill, many hardcore players became disillusioned and went back to playing SSF2T.

Alpha 2 can be viewed as Capcom's attempt to appeal to both the hardcore fighting game player and the weekend gamer. While newbie-happy features like chain combos (which threw the whole fighting game risk vs. reward factor out of whack) are thankfully gone from Alpha 2, most of the features from Alpha 1 have carried over, including the controversial Alpha counter, which strongly discourages come-from-behind victories. New to the mix is the custom combo, which, when enabled,



▶ Street Fighter Alpha 2 features a new Custom Combo system and bids farewell to Chain Combos (thankfully) to further enhance the gameplay. In addition, more classic characters return (such as Dhalsim and Zangief).

drains the player's entire super meter but allows the player to perform any move without recovery time, allowing for insane juggle combos.

Add in new and returning characters from the Street Fighter and Final Fight (which, incidentally, was a Street Fighter game at one point in its development cycle) universe, and you have Capcom's most ambitious game in terms of selectable characters since Super Street Fighter II Turbo. Returning from earlier Street Fighter games are Gen, who appeared as a foe in the very

seen, basically all of the background animation has made the transition intact; very impressive given that the arcade version set a new high-water mark for traditional 2-D fighting games.

Both the Saturn and PlayStation versions appear to be roughly similar in quality. At this stage of completion, it's clearly far too early to compare the two versions, but the differences we've noticed are minor at best. For example, the PlayStation version is missing some minor background animation on some stages that could be included in the final version.

At only 50 percent completion, Street Fighter Alpha 2 is a near-perfect rendition of the arcade game.

first Street Fighter, and Zangief and Dhalsim from Street Fighter II. Rolento, the industrial level boss character from Final Fight and Sakura, a new character who is a schoolgirl waxing obsessive about her hero Ryu, round out the list of new characters.

Graphics are dramatically improved over the first Alpha, with actual parallax and line scrolling as opposed to the original's relatively flat backdrops. Of the playfields we have

Additionally, the slowdown which plagued the PlayStation version of Darkstalkers is nowhere to be found, proving that that particular flaw was just an anomaly specific to that early effort.

At only 50 percent completion, Alpha 2 is a near-perfect rendition of the arcade game. While still early, the game more or less plays exactly like the arcade game, and is on track toward becoming Capcom's best port yet.

ig

NO PAIN, NO GAIN

AND IF YOU DON'T WATCH YOUR TAIL

NO PLANE!

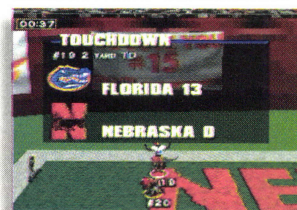


THIS IS NO RED FLAG EXERCISE. IT'S THE REAL THING! Push the envelope when you fly by-the-seat-of-your-pants in twelve searing missions. Engage in air-to-air, air-to-sea and air-to-ground combat with six real fighters to pilot and a gut-wrenching mix of 360° movement and ear-popping sound FX. Intense command action. *Only on the PlayStation™ game console.*



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▶ Slick television-style menu and data screens show off Sony's increased ability to create broadcast-quality still video imagery. All of the NCAA's key teams and player stats are here!



NCAA GameBreaker

Sony pitches the ball to their college players while GameDay '97 is finished up

Publisher: SCE America

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: SCE America

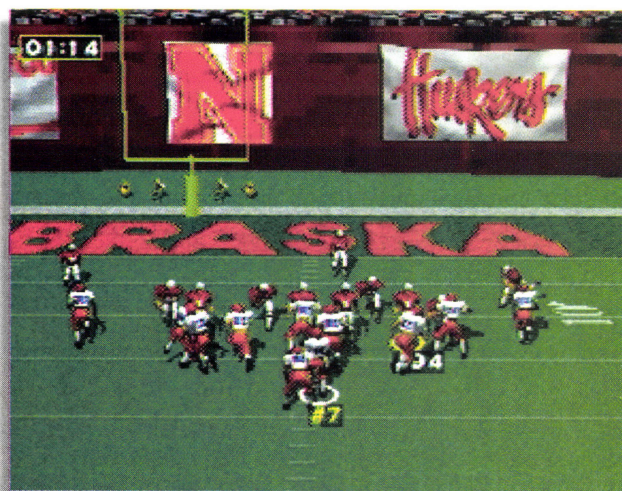
Release: August 1996

Although the PlayStation has enjoyed a wealth of successful sport games, the most popular sport that has been somewhat lost in the mix is college football.

If there was one simple statement that could sum up the concept of NCAA GameBreaker, the phrase "GameDay on steroids" would probably fit best. GameBreaker's engine is essentially the same as NFL GameDay's, minus one of its biggest weaknesses—sluggishness. GameBreaker moves roughly three times as fast as its predecessor, but speed isn't the only thing that sets this game apart from Sony's other football offering. GameBreaker's engine has been fitted with a slew of new gameplay features such as the ability to pitch the ball (a staple in almost every college offense), lateral it after the line of scrimmage has been crossed, and playful "interactive sidelines," in which team members move around while dodging players flying out of bounds.

Very importantly, there is a revamped college playbook, including over 400 plays. Within the very extensive playbook are many of the archaic and exotic offenses found in college football. Veer and Wishbone offenses, full-house backfields and crazy options are all included in the impressive book.

The whole atmosphere of college football is one of the highlights of this game. Twelve authentic fight songs can be heard during game time for selected schools such as USC, Notre Dame, and Northwestern, while an announcer seamlessly reels out



▶ Based on an enhanced version of the NFL GameDay game engine, GameBreaker's characters look better, move smoother and run much faster than before. Though the characters aren't huge, they're impressive.

articulate play-by-play commentary. More importantly, Sony has attempted to recreate the entire college season—including the weekly top 25 polling system, and various acknowledgements such as the

I-A conferences such as the BIG 12 and WAC. Unfortunately, what it does not contain are the names of the players on each team. Instead, they are represented by their jersey numbers and statistics—with your best

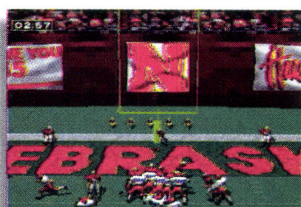
Twelve authentic fight songs can be heard during game time for schools such as USC and Notre Dame.

Heisman Trophy, Jim Thorpe and Doak Walker awards. Also included are the postseason games that contain several select bowl games including the Rose, Citrus and Gator Bowls.

If you don't want to be bothered with the college season, several modes of play are available, including a playoff tournament and an automatic national championship game. GameBreaker contains the name, logos and colors of 111 Division I-A teams, and all 11

players, or "GameBreakers" number showing up as yellow instead of white on the field. Each team's "GameBreakers" are listed before each game, allowing players to easily find out who their teams' best weapons are on defense or offense.

While NCAA GameBreaker may not look like a vast improvement over NFL GameDay, it should help college fans gear up for the new football season.



▶ All of the Division I stadiums are included in their full glory—GameBreaker doesn't just plop a team's logo in the center of the field and call it a new stadium.

COORS FIELD.®

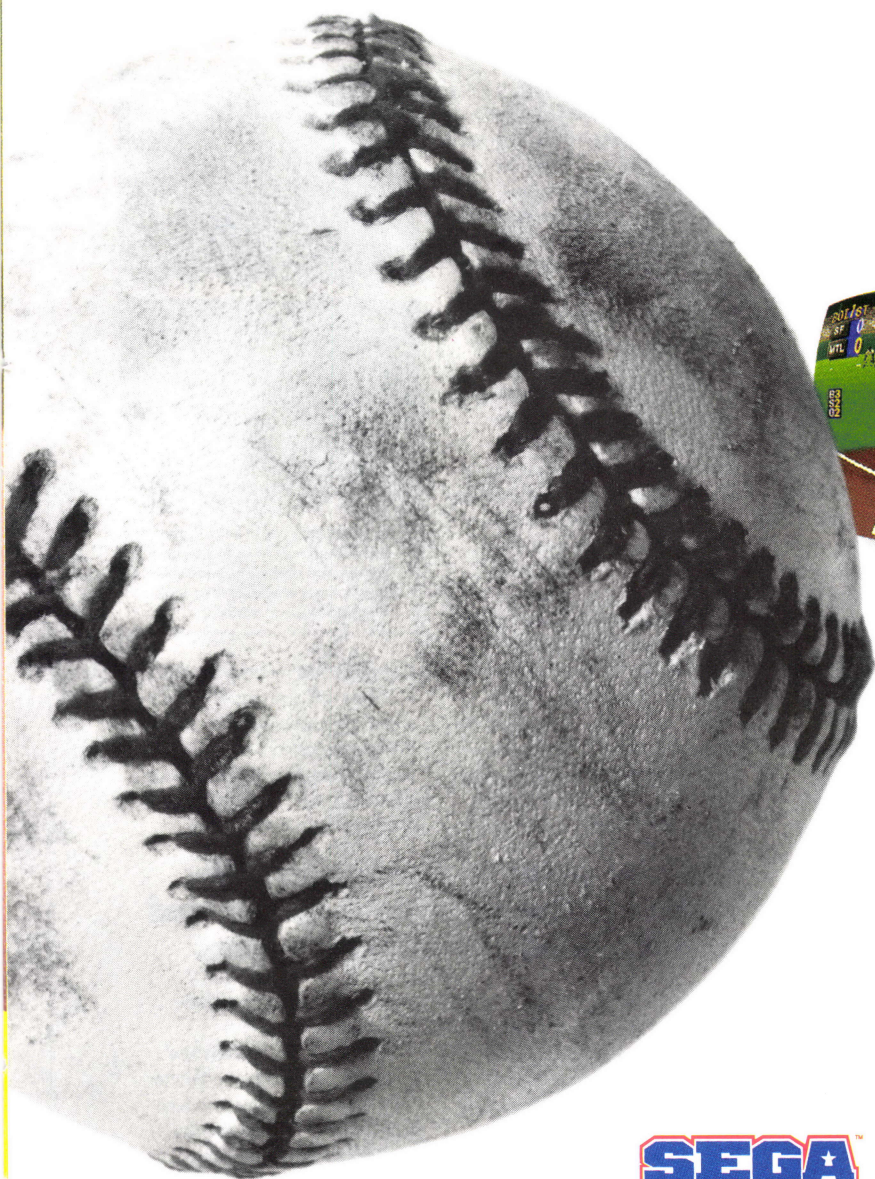
THE WIND IS BLOWING

OUT TO LEFT,

AND YOUR BUDDY'S

HANGING CURVE LOOKS

ABOUT THIS BIG.



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► Improved cockpit graphics help to give players a more accurate sense of TIE Fighter flight. Different imperial and rebel ships can be chosen by the player, as well, offering gamers a good selection.

X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter

You've fought alongside Luke, you've helped Darth Vader, now do both

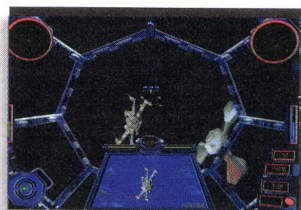
Publisher: LucasArts

Platform: PC

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Totally Games

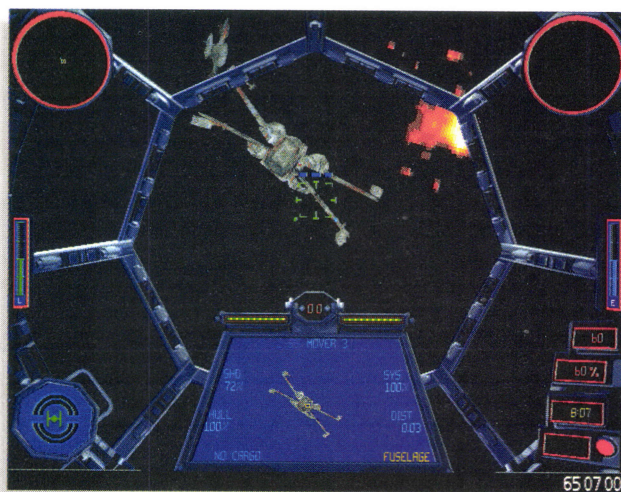
Release: December 1996



► Dramatic battle scenes give Star Wars fans cause to rejoice, as the old-fashioned limited engine has been replaced. Only the Star Wars movie trailer looks this hot.

Fans of the earlier X-Wing and TIE Fighter games will immediately notice the completely revamped graphics. What in X-Wing were simple flat polygons, and in TIE Fighter incorporated some basic Gouraud shading, have now been brought completely up to date with the additions of both lighting effects and texture-mapping. The texturing is particularly effective; the ships from *Star Wars* provided pre-existing, highly detailed models for LucasArts to work with, and as a result, the ships end up looking just as one would hope: as if they were straight out of the movies. While the texturing adds a lot to the effect created by all the ships, it is particularly effective in the case of the trademark *Star Wars* capital ships. In earlier games, when flying close to a Star Destroyer or Calamari Cruiser, the effect was greatly diminished by the fact that it was composed of huge, flat polygons, which lost all detail at close range. However, the addition of texture-mapping allows the larger polygons to be masked by the detail of the textures themselves, ensuring that the capital ships maintain their imposing visual effect at ranges as short as you might want to get. The addition of lighting effects, so that shots and explosions now light up the surrounding area appropriately, is really just icing on the cake.

The gameplay mechanics themselves, while very close to those in X-Wing and TIE Fighter, have undergone a few changes in the interests of general improvement and of making the transition to multiplayer

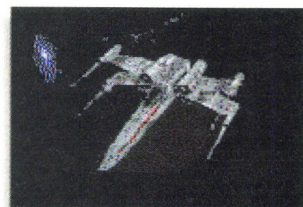
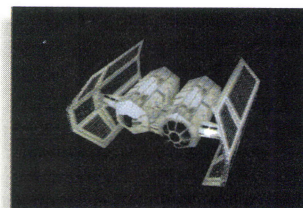


play. Perhaps the biggest changes are in the squadron mechanics: Other ships in your squadron are now much more intelligent and follow your orders much more closely than in earlier games. More importantly, you now have the ability to "jump" between ships in your squadron, alternately taking control of whichever ship you want to at any given time. Another addition to the play engine is a realtime map in 3-D—it allows you both to issue orders and to fly your ship while in map mode. A huge variety of ships are available to choose from, as well.

Of course, the real point of X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter is the multiplayer play, and that is where most of the effort is going. First, there will be an Arena-play mode to provide simple melee action. Players will choose what kind of ship they want, and may actually be provided with a squadron of ships to control. Squadron size may

The real point of X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter is the multiplayer play, and that is where the effort is going.

be used to assist with handicapping; since TIE Advanced are considerably better-equipped than TIE Fighters, a player using TIE Fighters would have a much larger squadron to control. Missions much like those in X-Wing and TIE Fighter will be available, except that instead of being alone in a universe full of AI-controlled ships, you will be able to play with or against friends while flying missions. For instance, the mission might be a Rebel attack on an Imperial



► In-game polygonal ships have been improved in both polygon complexity and texture-mapped detail. Even up close, they look like actual Lucas models.

Corvette. You might play an X-Wing aircover squadron while a friend plays the bombing Y-Wing squadron, or your friend might play an opposing squadron of TIE Fighters attempting to prevent the

Y-Wings from getting within bombing range.

Current plans call for the inclusion of the mission builder used by the developers, which ought to add a tremendous amount to the replay value, as what danger there might have been of getting bored of the available missions will no longer be a problem.

X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter is currently on track for a December release.



Bad To The Drone!

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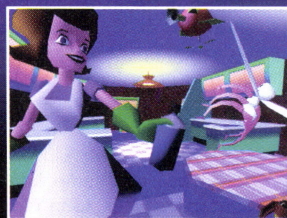
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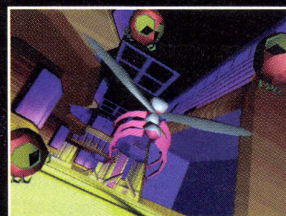
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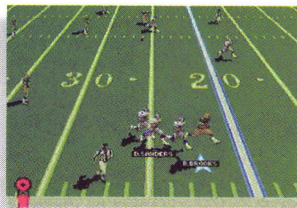
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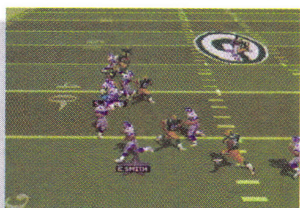
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Madden NFL 97

We know that it's better than NCAA GameBreaker, but can it beat Sony's new GameDay?

Release: September

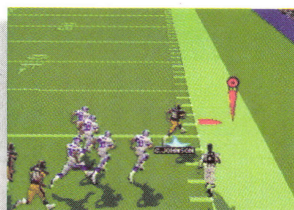
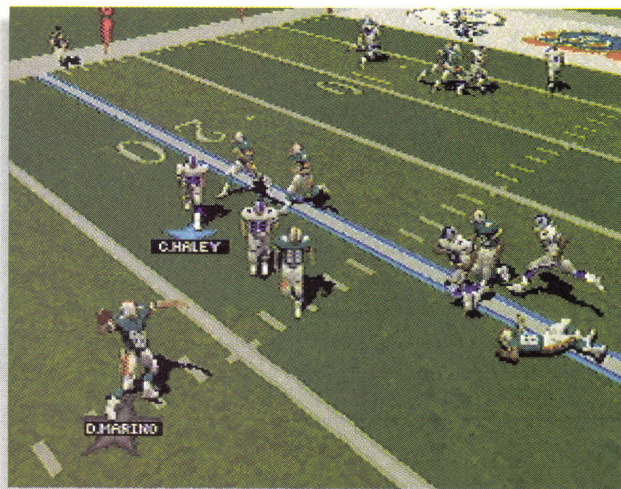


In-game graphics between the Saturn and PlayStation versions of Madden are virtually identical, save the superior quality of the PlayStation's full-motion video.

One of the biggest surprises regarding Madden NFL 97 is that EA's cherished football title will be ready for a simultaneous release in late September for both the PlayStation and the Saturn—with each product looking nearly identical to the other. The only noticeable difference between the two versions is that the outstanding full-motion-video sequences on the Saturn are of considerably less picture quality than its PlayStation counterpart.

Madden NFL 97 is an impressive football game that elaborates on EA's kinship with FOX broadcasters by bringing the entire broadcasting crew into the fold, in addition to Madden himself. Between each season game is a setup by James Brown with manly pregame football banter between John Madden and Pat Summerall in addition to their comments and "Maddenisms" during the game. Thankfully, all of this FMV glitz does not attempt to supplant great gameplay.

The football carnage takes place in fully 3-D rendered stadiums, with all 30 of them closely resembling their real-life counterparts. The football players are prerendered sprites, which move quite fluently thanks to motion-capture technology. Multiple camera angles are available to view the action, ranging from the "Classic Madden Cam" to sideline cameras and reverse-field angles. Madden football also promises to feature an array



While previous Madden games suffered from tiny, undetailed character sprites, EA has stepped up beyond even the 3DO version to create incredible renders.

of impressive options, many of them dealing with roster manipulation and season play. EA's notable "Create a Player" feature will be available, allowing you to put yourself in the game, or

option that will limit each team's spending—making trades difficult and realistic.

Season play will feature a large array of statistics, all savable via each system's memory device, and there is also a handy win-loss marker for two-player matches. At the end of each season, Pro-Bowl selections are automatically tabulated, and those players will be featured in a game right after the Super Bowl. There are over 100 teams from the present and past, along with some secret ones, and over 300 plays comprise the new playbook. Some of these plays are from the oldest

There are over 100 teams from the present and past, and over 300 plays make up the new playbook.

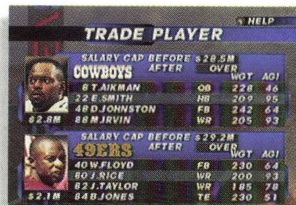
create a replica of the NFL players which are not a part of the NFLPA. You can then trade these newly created players onto the team of your choice, or just simply trade other players between teams to make your Dream Team of sorts. If you want to play by collective bargaining rules, there is a salary cap

Madden, but also feature multiple sets out of different formations.

With massive improvements, notable options, and impressive aesthetics, EA Sports is poised to retake the football crown that was lost with Madden's absence.



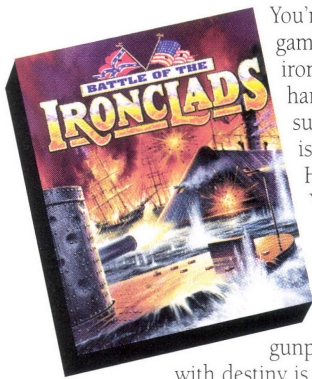
One of Madden's assets is its exceptionally detailed and television broadcast-quality set of player options. You can make your own player with a variety of statistics or trade players from teams based on not only skill but salary.



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View From The Monitor



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▶ Like *Soul Edge* and *Toshinden* before it, *Iron and Blood* is a weapons-combat title with medieval characters. Unlike its predecessors, I&B's fighters can use magical spells.

Iron and Blood: Warriors of Ravenloft

Take 2 brings *Dungeons and Dragons'* finest warriors into 3-D combat arenas

Publisher: Acclaim

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Take 2 Interactive

Release: September 1996



▶ *Iron and Blood's* 16 playable characters fight in a variety of styles and have clothes and items taken straight from TSR's *Dungeons and Dragons* series.

The PlayStation certainly isn't suffering from a lack of 3-D fighting games, and the latest entry into this crowded genre is Acclaim and Take Two Interactive's *Iron and Blood*. Featuring a fighting engine similar to Takara and Tamsoft's *Toshinden* series, what makes *Iron and Blood* distinct from other efforts are the licensed characters pulled directly from the *Dungeons and Dragons* universe.

The 16 playable characters come from two teams: Order and Chaos. The game features a variety of characters from both teams, from Torgo, the one-armed dwarf on the side of Order, to Nym Pymplee, a goblin warrior wielding two swords for Chaos.

Iron and Blood features several different modes. The first mode should be familiar to most fighting game fans: the Head-to-Head mode, where you can spar against the opposing characters in an arcade-style fashion. The other major mode is the Campaign mode, which allows you to pick five characters from your selected team, and face off against five characters from the opposing team. Each character can die several times before being eliminated, and characters who are injured in battle will recuperate while other characters wage their battles, adding a strategic element to the Campaign mode.

Graphically, the game is adequate. The polygon models are highly detailed, with good use of light sourcing, but like *Killing Zone* (reviewed in *IG#2*), suffer from a lack of animation, lending the game a somewhat choppy, unpolished look. At this



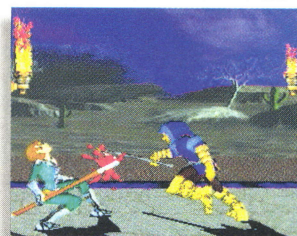
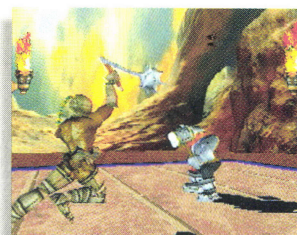
stage of completion, however, it is premature to condemn the game for its animation, as very few of the special moves have been implemented in the version we have seen and it is entirely possible for the game to improve dramatically in the months to come.

The game engine is clearly very early at this point, but already notably different from most other 3-D fighting games is the lack of a universal jumping ability, which generally limits fighters to ground combat; logical, since most of the characters are wearing heavy armor anyway. Players can, however, block and sidestep at will using the shoulder buttons, and normal

The game features a wide variety of 16 playable characters from both of the teams of Order and Chaos.

moves are done using combinations of three stick positions (up, down and neutral) and the four face buttons.

The preliminary instructions we have received also describe the special moves, most of which seem to be unimplemented so far. Special moves apparently will be performed by occasionally arcane combinations of joystick and button presses, and special items will be hidden on the various stages. In addition, characters who fight on their own stage will have a "home turf" advantage, which



▶ While other 3-D fighters have gone for realism, *Iron and Blood* adapts the cartoony fantasy style of titles such as *WeaponLord* for polygonal graphics.

will manifest itself in different ways for each character. All of these undocumented features suggest that the game will appeal to the *Mortal Kombat* crowd with its loads of secrets.

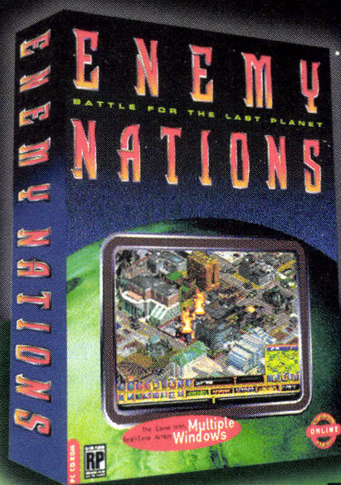
Perhaps that is where this reviewer found fault with this early version of the game; it has always been our opinion that fighting games should stand on their own in terms of gameplay, as opposed to clouding the issue by having an overload of secrets to find. Right now, the game needs significant refinement to even aspire to the same level of play that say, *Virtua Fighter 2* or *Tekken 2* command. But as an interesting, if somewhat uninspired (at this point) addition to the long lineup of 3-D fighters, *Iron and Blood* will fill many a gamer's craving for swordplay and secrets.

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▶ Based on the same technology that powered Capcom's *Resident Evil*, *Perfect Weapon* improves on the formula by adding more diverse backgrounds and better character graphics.

Perfect Weapon

Gray Matter delivers the first 3-D take on Capcom's classic *Final Fight*

Publisher: American Softworks

Platform: PS/Saturn/Win95

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Gray Matter

Release: Nov. (PS & Win95) Q1 '97 (Saturn)



▶ Dealing with *Resident Evil*'s boring static backgrounds, Gray Matter decided to allow the camera to zoom in and out for dramatic effects during fight scenes.

When *Resident Evil* came out, it was praised for its detailed 3-D characters and its use of camera angles to create suspense. Never mind that the character animation wasn't the best, or that the backgrounds were completely flat, or that the voice acting was questionable at best; the game hooked many through its blend of exploration, puzzle solving, realtime combat and most of all, atmosphere.

Enter *Perfect Weapon*. Utilizing a similar engine, *Perfect Weapon* combines the puzzle aspects of *Resident Evil* with an interesting 3-D fighting engine which allows up to four enemies to attack the protagonist at once, all while maintaining a constant 30 frames per second.

The plot is simple: As Blake Hunter, champion martial artist and Earth Defense Force agent, you are kidnapped by aliens and shanghaied to a faraway moon. You fight until you face an alien who wants to become a martial arts champion.

Perfect Weapon does several things that put it a cut above similar, previous efforts. First is the use of transparent background loading, which means that there is no load time when the scene changes. The game still uses static background scenery; but the designers have implemented a clever zoom-in feature during combat that gives the game a highly dynamic feel despite the fixed camera angles.

The 3-D engine is also impressive, with Blake consisting of around 800 Gouraud shaded, light-sourced polygons. Enemies vary in complexity depending



on how many are on the screen at any given moment, which is a clever way to stretch the system's capabilities. The PlayStation version runs at a resolution of 512x220, while the Saturn version will run at 320x220. The PC version currently gets about 15 frames per second on an unaccelerated

senseless, for example. The combat sequences feel a bit like *Final Fight* meets *Tekken*; your character can block and sidestep, and the four buttons on the face of the controller correspond to your four limbs, making pummeling multiple foes fairly intuitive. Additionally, the computer will attempt to automatically line up

While gameplay is not as deep as a dedicated 3-D brawler, you can perform lots of special moves.

Pentium 133, although *Perfect Weapon* will support DirectX and any 3-D hardware accelerator supported under Direct3-D.

The most exciting part of *Perfect Weapon*, however, is the fighting aspect. While the engine is not as sophisticated as a dedicated 3-D brawler, *Perfect Weapon* does allow your character to perform lots of special moves, starting with a few basic combos consisting mainly of button press-type moves to complex 10-hit chains once they are learned from fallen opponents. Some enemies are smart enough to team up against you, with the aliens cooperating in picking you up and beating you

the next foe, eliminating a problem which marred *Origin's* *Bioforge*—the combat was frustrating because it was difficult to line your character up properly.

Perfect Weapon also uses a dynamic musical score. Since the CD-ROM is constantly in use to load new backdrops into RAM, audio consists of music generated by Sony's PCM sound chip. At this stage of completion, ambient level music and fast-paced fight themes add considerably to the game.

The exploration and puzzle aspect, while not as difficult as *Resident Evil*, will keep players from mindlessly storming through each of the game's five levels. Puzzles tend to consist of finding keys and discovering hidden passages, as well as disarming nasty traps, many of which spawn an unending supply of alien nasties.

Perfect Weapon is a highly ambitious title that blends the best of several genres, creating a new synthesis that even at this early stage plays very well. As such, we are anxiously awaiting its release this winter. Moo!



▶ Alongside the fighting scenes, there are other rendered rooms where you're allowed to wander around and explore in the darkness or brilliance of a stage.



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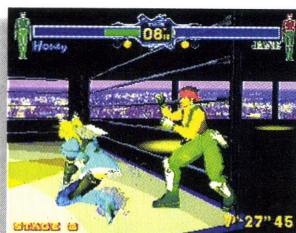
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▶ The moves aren't as exciting as those used in Sega's *Virtua Fighter* series, but they're still pretty good looking...as are the nine smooth and detailed new characters, and their new backgrounds.



Fighting Vipers

Sega steps a bit beyond last year's VF2 port with an improved Saturn fighter

Publisher: Sega of America

Platform: Saturn

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Sega AM2

Release: November 1996

Now that IG has received a playable 55-percent complete version of Sega's *Fighting Vipers*, we're ready to give you an early verdict on the quality of the latest fighting game translation to hit the Saturn.

We're very impressed. As we've mentioned in previous issues of *Intelligent Gamer* and IG's *FUSION*, *Fighting Vipers* is most definitely a "B" title compared with the *Virtua Fighter* series—there are nine bizarre characters whose moves and motions are realistic but have almost nothing to do with martial arts, and every little element of the game is ever-so-slightly skewed from the almost optimal balance achieved in *Virtua Fighter 2*.

The most notable examples of *Fighting Vipers*' skew are characters such as Picky, who smacks opponents with a skateboard; Raxel, who hammers people with an electric guitar and Bahn, who looks like a bouncer from a leather bar. One background places you in a wild west scene complete with a Cow Patty Ice Cream Store, and others place you in the middle of night clubs and concrete-walled arenas. By comparison with the cool VF characters and serene environments, the *Fighting Vipers* and their stages are all just freaky.

(The other characters, for reference, are Sanman, a porky wrestler type with black pads and a helmet; Grace, a Rollerblading girl with standard protective gear; Honey, a club-hopping girl with a short shiny skirt; Jane, a butch female ready for a physical altercation; Tokio,



▶ Jane charges one of her dynamic energy attacks, which pulses from her body as she prepares to ram her body into Bahn. Both characters have some moves in common with *Virtua Fighter*'s Akira, as opposed to the backgrounds, which are as different as one could imagine. Cow Patty Ice Cream restaurant?

a Japanese guy who wears clothing oddly similar to *Super Street Fighter II*'s T. Hawk and Mahler, the game's final boss, whose snakey helmet makes

others begin with a 3-D energy pulse which emanates from your character to show their psychic power. None of the moves stoop to a *Mortal Kombat* level of

When characters fall to the ground, energy circles pulse on the floor, and chunks of their armor fall off.

him look like former G.I. Joe villain Serpentor.)

But on a technical level, *Fighting Vipers* is a more impressive Saturn translation compromise than *Virtua Fighter 2*. Even though the FV characters' moves are primarily street attacks and not gorgeous motion-captured martial artist kicks and punches, they look just as fluid and perhaps even more exciting than those in VF2. Several moves loft your enemies up into the air, and a variety of

cheesyness, nor do any of them strike you as being as impressive as those in *Virtua Fighter*.

When characters fall to the ground, energy circles pulse on the floor, and when they trade blows, chunks of their metal armor flake off and disappear. Repeated blows will strip the clothing off of your character, leaving women in bikini tops and men with bare chests.

Backgrounds are one step more complex than they were in *Virtua Fighter 2*. There are still a



▶ An energy pulse emanates from the fighters as they get smacked and hit the ground.

▶

couple layers of parallax scrolling artwork in the distance, which includes objects that were formerly fully 3-D polygons in the arcade game, and one of the layers scales in and out to give you a sense of zooming proximity to your character.

As mentioned previously in *Intelligent Gamer*, the most noticeable visual differences between FV and VF2 are Vipers' inclusion of interactive fences and varying levels of clothing. The backgrounds step beyond VF2 by putting up a set of shatterable 3-D walls in each stage, which are broken when you throw your opponent through the walls at the end of the stage. Your standard and special attacks can be used in conjunction with the walls, which change the entire equation from the easy Ring Outs in VF and VF2; now you can force your enemy into a corner and beat him down.

You can also knock off all of your opponent's body armor complete with a dramatic triple camera take of that attack, making it easier for him to take damage later in the game. Though the shattering effects are not precisely as impressive as their arcade equivalents as of our early playtest, they still look good, and Sega has even improved the character graphics a bit by Gouraud shading the textures.

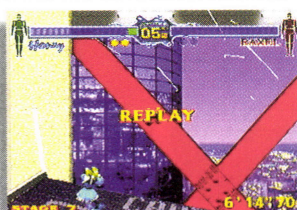
At the moment, the game's



Eight standard characters are selectable, and boss character Mahler will be available for player control via a special code. Mahler is the personification of the Viper.

audio portion is incomplete, though many of the voices are in and a couple of the music tracks play repeatedly through the stages. Though the music is pretty good Japanese-inspired rock, the voices (while reasonable in sonic quality) are...you guessed it, weird. Rather than going with the simple "Round 1," and "Fight!" effects that people would expect, AM2 went a bit overboard and popped in longer audio samples that tend to become overly intrusive. This isn't a flaw with the Saturn translation so much as it's an annoying part of the arcade original.

Though the shattering effects are not precisely as impressive as their arcade equivalents, they look good.



Fighting near the glass windows of an elevator can be deadly—here someone smashes through and dies.

From a visual standpoint, Fighting Vipers does more with polygons and special effects than any previous home fighter, though *Soul Edge* may well step beyond it when the PlayStation version is released in Japan later this year.

Though it still has some way to go before completion, Fighting Vipers is already both fun to play and impressive to watch. Multiple speed settings and arranged music appear set to be in the final revision, which should be hitting Japanese stores at the end of August and American ones in November. Viva le vipers!



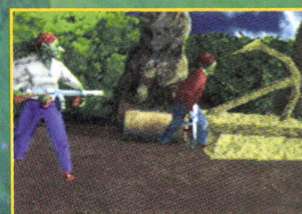
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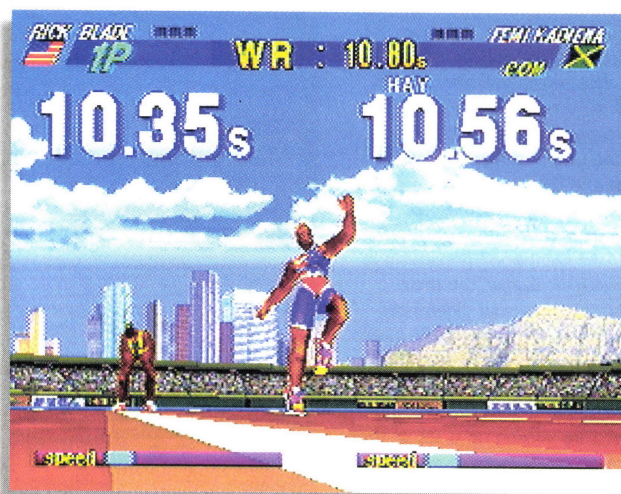
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► Polygonal characters combine with mostly flat backgrounds to create impressive but not perfect three-dimensional effects. Arcade-quality high-resolution realism has given Sega a visual edge.



Decathlete

Sega puts its best polygonal men and women on the Saturn's VR track and field

Publisher: Sega of America

Platform: Saturn

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Sega Enterprises

Release: Third Quarter 1996

A couple of months ago, we reviewed Konami's International Track and Field for the PlayStation, an impressive Olympic decathlon title that we thought would be pretty hard to beat. Last month, we looked at Eidos Interactive's Olympic Summer Games, a game that couldn't compete visually with IT&F but had an even wider variety of athletic events to compete in.

In both design and execution, Sega's Decathlete is a perfect match for Konami's IT&F. Both games were coded by their respective companies' arcade teams rather than home console teams, which means that

graphics, visual concepts and fluid character animations which look as if they're straight out of the Saturn port of Virtua Fighter 2. You can select from seven player characters—four male and three female—each of whom both officially and physically represents a country. While Konami did a great job with their IT&F characters, Sega's have more personality—namely in both their caricatures and motion-captured pre- and postrace animations.

Konami's keys to success in International Track and Field were the character animations and the use of in-game camera angles to make the events look interesting. Decathlete's anima-

Where Decathlete slips a little is in the exact same place where Virtua Fighter 2 for the Saturn was most lacking: The characters look great, but the backgrounds are pretty flat. Unlike IT&F, there aren't huge crowds of in-arena spectators and there aren't any other physical objects in the arena where you save your opponent and whatever your event requires, and while this doesn't hurt the game's appeal, it's the difference between perfection and something close.

Sega does thoroughly outperform its closest competitors in audio, though. While Konami and Sega Olympic titles aimed for dominant arcade-style music during the preplay portions of the game and a heavier emphasis on voices and crowd noise during the events, Sega's voices (though similar in quantity) are just a notch higher in quality than what Konami attempted.

Gameplay and lasting power in these Olympic titles have both been sticking points: Eidos was able to win out in lasting power by including a large variety of events, but no one has really attempted to improve

Has Sega created the perfect game, visually? Not yet. They chose to have fewer polys and higher res.

a heavy emphasis was placed on making every minute of each game's visuals dynamic and exciting. Moreover, both Decathlete and IT&F used console-compatible arcade hardware, which made it easy enough to port the games from arcade to home that most people will see the console versions before they even come in contact with the original arcade units. The down side of games designed for the arcade is that they often lack depth—they're designed for a quick play or five before the player moves on to something else. Why put in 20 events when most people will only play eight?

Thus, what Decathlete delivers is a visually stunning arcade-like experience for the Saturn, including high-resolution

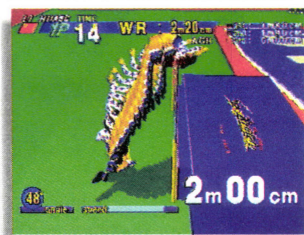
tions are just as good as IT&F's, if not better, and as a direct result of Sega's use of the Saturn's high-resolution mode, they've actually managed to make their characters look more realistic (read: less jagged-looking) than the terrific ones Konami created. Given our love for what Konami delivered months ago, does this mean that Sega has created the perfect game, visually? Not yet. Every company faces tradeoffs in designing a game, and Konami chose to have lots of polygons and standard resolution. Sega chose to have fewer polygons and higher resolution.



► Motion-captured animations give the characters—even the oddly stereotyped and somewhat weird ones—the best animations seen yet on a home system.



► Throwing events such as the shot put give you a variety of exciting camera angles. The shot put actually hurdles toward the screen after release, landing in the field and wrecking the grass.



One of the main differences between Sega's and Konami's games is the motion blur effect when you make major jumps or do critical things during events.

much upon the "press the same button over and over" concept—including, unfortunately, Sega. Thankfully, the button pressing seems to be more rhythm-intensive than smashing-dependent, and Decathlete scores a few bonus points for being less torturous on the hands.

The most major features missing from Decathlete are multiplayer support and extra events: Sega only allows two-player simultaneous play, and there are only 10 different types of athletic competitions—Konami has Sega edged out by one event, Eidos by plenty. Interestingly, Konami's most graphically challenging event (freestyle swimming) is nowhere to be found in Decathlete, nor are the Triple Jump or Hammer Throw—instead, there are tough 400-meter races and torturous 1500-meter races to be run. Some of Decathlete's events are far easier to master than IT&F's, as well—rather than forcing you to hit one button and then suddenly press and hold another to change your angle, Decathlete has you do one and then (surrealistically) stop and do the other as your onscreen character is flash-frozen in time.

All in all, Decathlete is a good game for its genre and Sega's most ambitious Saturn sports game to date. There may not be many choices for fans of track and field, but at least Decathlete is a solid enough title that few will complain about its features.

Ten Challenges

100 Meter Dash: A one-on-one race to see who runs faster through 100 meters of track.

Shot Put: Pitch a heavy ball into a field and go for distance. Let it go and watch it ribbet!

High Jump: Pick your height and jump the high bar. Action button changes the angle.

110 Meter Hurdles: Run against one opponent and clear a set of hurdles.

Long Jump: Build up speed by running and pitch yourself as far as you can into a bed of dirt.

400 Meter Race: Run against an opponent for 400 meters and make sure you survive.

Pole Vault: Run at top speed with a huge pole and clear a bar elevated many feet up.

Discus Throw: Take a heavy frisbee and pitch it into the field to accomplish the best distance.

Javelin Throw: Release the javelin at a 45-degree angle and send it soaring into the field.

1500 Meter Race: Race against a number of opponents in a test of endurance.

GRAPHICS:

- ++ Excellent motion-captured athletes look very realistic.
- +/- Backgrounds are reasonably flat, but look pretty good.

SOUNDS:

- +/- Pretty good music for what is there...too little.
- + Good digitized voices add a bit to the score.

GAMEPLAY:

- + A pretty nice variety of events that are sure to give players a workout.
- ...still a lot of button-smashing. Time to evolve.

LASTING POWER:

- + Two-player option will keep the game worthwhile for some time.
- Not enough events, not enough diversity, sometimes too little difficulty.

OVERALL
RECOMMENDED

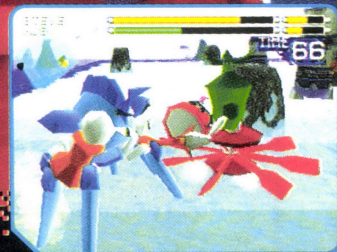
ig

NICE PUNCH.

Unfortunately, he has an iron jaw (and a rocket launcher).

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▶ Nightmarish boss scenes such as this one give NiGHTS an opportunity to lock horns with huge, colorful 3-D enemies. This combination dragon and frog must be grabbed and thrown.

NiGHTS

Sega welcomes their brand-new potential mascot into his first 3-D Saturn adventure

Publisher: Sega of America

Platform: Saturn

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Sonic Team

Release: Now Available



Some objects, such as orbs, are hovering out of your immediate flightpath. Spiraling in the air will create an energy blast to grab them and add them to your tally.

No one would have expected that Sega was ready to take a new and unknown character and give it equal footing in 1996 with their firmly established mascot, Sonic the Hedgehog, but they have: NiGHTS for the Saturn is as important a title for Sega today as Sonic the Hedgehog was to the Genesis when Nintendo prepared to launch the SNES.

At the beginning of every level, you control either Elliot or Claris, human characters who go to sleep unhappy and dream of conquering their fears. Awakening in 3-D worlds filled with hills, valleys, rivers and animals, the two humans are surrounded by colored (personality trait) stars for roughly three seconds, at which point some enemies fly in and steal the stars to scatter across the level. Now, should you decide to do so, Elliot and Claris can walk and jump around the world with full 3-D freedom as Mario might in Super Mario 64, but that's not really the point of this game—your first goal after each ambush is to locate NiGHTS, a friendly but sly-looking little flying jester, and touch him with your human character. At that point, you take control of NiGHTS and become involved in the game's standard action.

So, yes, there are 3-D worlds here, but Sega decided that the game wouldn't be exciting if you just flew through 3-D levels, so they pulled off a neat little trick to restrict your movement while allowing you to fly up, down, left and right at your whim. The easiest way to describe the complex premise behind



NiGHTS is by thinking of each level as a series of rubberbands connected to each other at one point per a pair of bands, with the 3-D world artwork trapped in the center of one of the rubberbands. As you travel around each band, you see the world moving in 3-D perspective from your current location, but you can only travel around the band and cannot stray from the bands' predefined paths. To sum all of this up, the whole experience is like playing a side-scrolling 2-D game where you fly around and watch pretty 3-D artwork in the background.

There are several things that you can do while you fly: Though your main objective is to complete four stages—each



▶ NiGHTS flies around a forest stage gathering blue orbs and flying through hoops to collect points. "Links" are quick, repeated grabs.

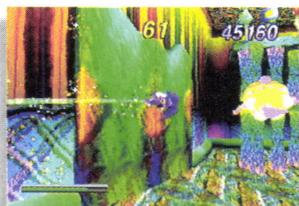
Sega decided that the game wouldn't be exciting if you just flew through 3-D levels, so they pulled a neat little trick.

a mission to rescue a personal-ity star—per level by gathering up 20 blue orbs per stage and

depositing the orbs in (and thus destroying) Ideya Capture devices, there are plenty of side tasks to keep you moving and exploring. You spend a lot of your time flying through floating hoops, gathering small stars, navigating around each level's obstacles and trying to find the points in each level where the rubberband paths intersect. Invariably, you'll either have to travel through a level's preset path several times to gather enough orbs to complete a level (orbs replenish themselves each



▶ As the timer counts down, you fly through these rings picking up orbs and delivering them in Ideya Captures (left). Once you're successful, you carry the colored star you receive back to the beginning of the level, and move on.



Another dramatic boss scene gives you one chance to stop the fat lady from singing. A rotund clown-like opera singer floats around in a hallway until you grab her by the belly and throw her through walls. Breakable pillars on the right side of every section of hall give you an area to aim her at.

time you make a complete loop around the world), or you'll have to find obscure intersections to gain access to a nest full of orbs. Controls are simple: Flight is accomplished with either the digital joystick or the analog one on Sega's new 3-D Control Pad, and the A, B and C buttons all use up a little of your turbo flight meter to let you fly faster for a moment or let you jump when you're Claris or Elliot. The L and R buttons give you a small spin on a different axis as NiGHTS and rotate the world around in 90-degree increments as one of the kids.

A time limit prevents you from flying around forever—when it runs out, Elliot or Claris are split from NiGHTS in mid-air, plunging to the ground and losing all of their collected orbs. When you fall, you return to

the full 3-D control scheme and have to pick up some orbs and make your way back to first the Ideya Capture station and then the pagoda where NiGHTS sits waiting for you. If you complete all four stages in a level, you'll move on to a beautiful boss stage where there is but one rubberband path to travel and one enemy to eliminate.

NiGHTS is like nothing you've ever played or seen, and it succeeds quite thoroughly in making a good first impression once you've learned how to play the game. By the same token, the novel premise may take a little getting used to for younger players, and some may even be daunted by the somewhat confusing nature of the design—it often looks to the observer as if you should be able to do more, despite the fact that you'll have your hands full with what's there.

Where Sonic the Hedgehog was colorful yet intentionally designed to make teenagers say "cool!" every stage or two, NiGHTS tackles the Mario mentality head-on. The visual themes are scenes out of nature, dreams and nightmares—levels are mostly bright and natural—

The emphasis outside is constantly on the magical nature of NiGHTS—he trails stars as he moves.

gardens complete with sandy beaches and light blue oceans, arctic mountains surrounded by frozen lakes, forests full of sparkling streams and surprisingly detailed outdoor museums. Animals outdoors are small and cute, and the emphasis outside is constantly on the magical nature of NiGHTS himself—he

trails stars as he moves, pirouettes and twists as he floats and flies, and constantly seems to be active past the normal standard or activity. By contrast, boss scenes are Claris and Elliot's dreams and nightmares, full of darkness and rich colors, large enemies and propulsion objects which force you to travel through the Z-axis of depth movement.

Perhaps the single largest surprise in NiGHTS is its audio portion, which has been continually fine-tuned and improved through the various versions of the game that we've tested. The soundtrack, which ranges in mood from peppy, mystical and exciting in the levels to upbeat jazzy blues, funk and opera in

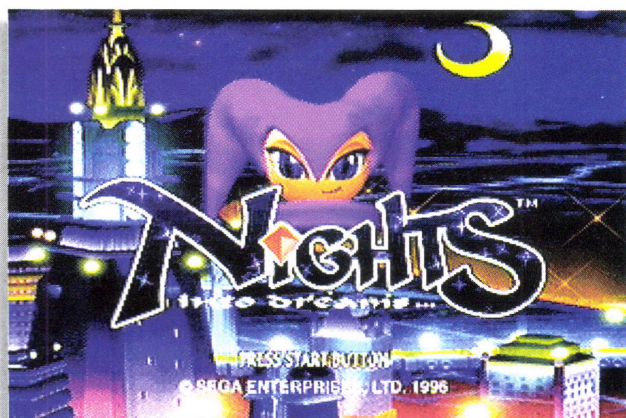


Some beautifully rendered full-motion video sequences introduce you to Claris and Elliot. Their dreams become twisted nightmares.

tle something more.

Most of the fun to be had in NiGHTS is in the process of learning how to fly, gather orbs, get bonus points and defeat a variety of challenging boss patterns. As you only have one "life" and your game ends entirely when you either wake up from your dream as Elliot and Claris or die fighting a boss, you'll have to go through many of the tasks several times before you can really get to move on in the game. Earning your way to the game's final stages requires you to complete three each of Claris' and Elliot's stages with C grades, and performance is rated between A and F. Failure to complete one level task automatically earns you an F for that part of the stage. Successful completion may earn you a C or D depending on the points you racked up.

Beating the stages will take the average player a day or two. Getting Cs or better may take two or three days, and As five or more. We're not convinced that this is the best way to keep a player enjoying a game, but at the very least, there are rewards—such as a hidden two-player one-on-one combat mode—for successful performance. This is compensation for having only a handful of short but sweet stages to play.



IG playtested several versions of NiGHTS, and even the title screen (shown above) improved dramatically as the game went through development.



One of the more challenging stages in NiGHTS forces you to bounce in 3-D off of two huge green pillars and propel yourself toward orbs and the goal.

To get the answer to an obvious question out of the way, NiGHTS is not exactly Sega" parallel to Nintendo's Super Mario 64. It's a counter-strike. The two titles are neither similar in concept nor in execution—like Sonic the Hedgehog before it, NiGHTS is a roller-coaster ride constantly attempting to excite you with speed and reflex while Super Mario 64 is a haunted house full of rooms which will surprise and delight. No good amusement park would be complete without either.

ig

GRAPHICS:

- + Graphics are vivid, colorful and exciting.
- + An innovative visual concept done perfectly the first time.

SOUNDS:

- + Superb music which is as memorable as anything Sega has ever produced.
- + Extremely fitting effects.

GAMEPLAY:

- + A very simple concept that proves very enjoyable.
- Still not as deep as it could have been, though going for all As is hard.

LASTING POWER:

- + Upon completion, you get a limited two-player mode.
- Completing NiGHTS should be pretty easy for a good player.

OVERALL

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

A-

IG Talks With NiGHTS' Creative Team

Sega Enterprises' Sonic Team has been responsible for the Sonic the Hedgehog series and the Shining games, including Shining in the Darkness, Shining Force and Shining Wisdom. Yuji Naka, Naoto Oshima and Takashi Iizuka from Sonic Team sat with *Intelligent Gamer* for an interview on their upcoming game NiGHTS.

IG: How long did it take for the development time of NiGHTS?

YN: Actually, after the completion of Sonic & Knuckles, I came back to Japan and started brainstorming ideas. So that preparation work took about six months. The actual work got under way last year on April 1, 1995.

IG: Is the time period limited in how long you have to brainstorm?

YN: No, we keep on doing this until we are satisfied that we have a good idea and initial game design. In this instance, NiGHTS took six months in just the planning stage.

IG: Who designed the character NiGHTS?

YN: Oshima designed the character NiGHTS as well as Sonic. He created all the animation patterns as well as the character behind the character (laughs).

IG: So Mr. Oshima was the one who decided what sort of character NiGHTS was going to be?

NO: No, not really. I would think up ideas and show the rest of the crew and have them respond saying, no I don't like that at all...and that idea design would be thrown out.

YN: It was important in my mind that everybody had the same direction in the creation process. So within that framework, we had to have a character that everyone liked. And if all of us could reach an agreement on a character, we hoped that it would appeal to the rest of the world. We certainly had a lot of discussion on what sort of character it

should be, putting in and taking out things. We have also done extensive research in America, Europe and Japan to see what would be the most appealing character, and that data is certainly taken into account before the final choice of character was decided upon.

IG: How would you compare your two characters, Sonic and NiGHTS?

NO: Well Sonic, as you probably well know, is a cool character. Doesn't let things phase him and goes about his business. NiGHTS on the other hand is very emotional. When he reacts, you know what he's feeling. An expressive little guy.

IG: Where did the original story concept come from?

TI: Well, we wanted a character that could fly, and we were looking for an appropriate world or setting for this to take place. We had not even thought of having it in a dream, yet. We were just looking for a cool setting...Naka might be better able to explain this...

YN: One of the main reasons was to give the character a feeling of reality. To make the player feel that NiGHTS could actually exist. There are many superheroes, but those cannot possibly exist in the real world. However, we want to give kids the possibility that NiGHTS may actually exist somewhere. So our first idea for a setting was actually a rainbow. When a rainbow appears, it seems to create a bridge between two different places, and so NiGHTS' world was between these two places. That way, whenever kids see a rainbow, they could say that's where NiGHTS lives. And have them believe that NiGHTS is actually watching over them and with them. This belief could also never be quite shattered, because you can't actually reach the arch of a rainbow. However, we ran into a problem; since our objective was to make a game for people all around the world, we started to think that not everybody might have ever seen a rainbow, and if they haven't seen a rainbow, the possibility of NiGHTS

disappears for them. We wanted something that everybody, no matter where they live, could understand and enjoy NiGHTS, and then we realized that everybody dreams. And that at times, we believe our own dreams. That dreams are a reality in and of themselves, to the point that you can talk about your dreams to somebody else. And if we make the setting in a dream world, and if you believe enough, you can actually see and meet NiGHTS. Therefore, we chose NiGHTS so that everyone in the world would have a common basis to see and believe in NiGHTS. One of the things that would be nice if it happens is, when a child is having problems getting to sleep, for that parent to say to them, "NiGHTS is waiting for you when you get to sleep." That is one of the things that would be nice if it happens.

IG: How about the characters? They don't seem to be quite Japanese.

YN: Well, we wanted a character that would be appealing to all, and for the people that played to draw their own conclusions about what sort of character he should be. Some will think of NiGHTS as a European court Jester, or a clown.

NO: I suppose that NiGHTS does have a European influence, but how he acts and reacts may be more American oriented, in my mind (laughs).

YN: Yes, there are times when NiGHTS will be really elegant and other times he will fool around and stick his tongue out, or a number of other comical actions. We tried to think up a character design that would appeal to people around the world. By that token, there may be places where the NiGHTS character just doesn't work, while other places where NiGHTS will be loved. With the success of Sonic in the U.S. and Europe, we feel our next character will be popular as well.

IG: How did the character originally start off?

NO: He first started off as a pure white character.

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▶ Go through and replay some of the most spectacular moments from your races, including career-ending crashes such as this one. Thankfully, your car recovers its components automatically.

Andretti Racing

EA and the Andretti family join forces to produce a solid racing experience

Publisher: EA Sports

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Stormfront Studios

Release: Third Quarter 1996



▶ International tracks play host to impressive and colorful stock cars, and background pop-up—even with complex Asian motifs—is minimal.

Currently next-generation platforms are the testing grounds for neo-realistic race simulations such as EA's Andretti racing and the forthcoming F-1 by Psygnosis. As far as the PlayStation is concerned, the main question left to be answered is which of these two super games will prove to be the best 32-Bit racing simulation so far.

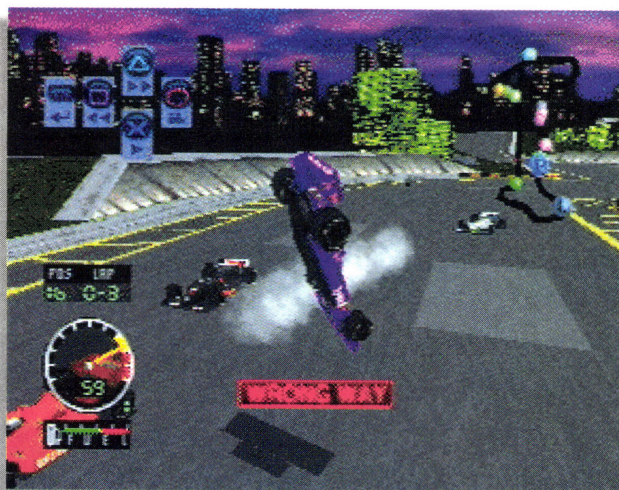
At the moment, Andretti Racing most certainly has diversity in its favor. As might be assumed from the use of the famous entire family's name rather than just that of Mario, Michael or Jeff, you're not restricted to just F-1 driving:

You're not restricted to just F-1. You can drive either an Indy car or a stock car on the selection of tracks.

The most distinctive part of Andretti is the player's option to drive either an Indy car or a stock car on the large selection of tracks. The best part of this feature is that the cars have completely different geometries and appearances, not to mention their own distinctive handling characteristics.

The Andrettis themselves offer a number of tutorial lessons in racing the Indy and stock cars, presented in an interview format using high-resolution video. In fact, the game's menu screens and movie clips are all run in high resolution, which gives them a level of detail and sharpness previously unseen on the PlayStation.

The game itself runs in standard resolution, though, but it looks pretty darn good; the cars



and background move well and have only minimal pop-up, with everything paced at a little under 30 frames per second. You can race against an opponent in full-screen mode if you so desire, but EA also implemented a great split-screen feature which enables two players to race simultaneously against one another. Luckily, the frame rate seems stable and reasonable even in split-screen mode.

Three views are available to the driver during races, including two external views (one close, one more distant) from behind your car and one view from the car's driver's seat. There's also an enhanced rear-view mirror feature which



▶ Split- and full-screen modes enable players to race alone or against friends, and the detail level remains impressive throughout.

GRAPHICS:

- +/- Generally smooth speed and minimal pop-up, but not ultra-exciting.
- + Car models and tracks are super.

SOUNDS:

- + Good rockin' music that sets the right tone.
- +/- Sound effects are fine but not incredible.

GAMEPLAY:

- + Two different types of racing in one game? Mein gott in himmel!
- + Both types of racing are fun and challenging.

LASTING POWER:

- + Quite a few tracks, cars, customization options and modes.
- + Two-player games can thankfully be linked or split-screened.

OVERALL

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

A-

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A

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A-

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▶ Having been away for almost five years, Mario returns to the scene in fitting style. Accompanied by his cameraman Lakitu, he sets off on his longest, most amazing journey yet.

Super Mario 64

Mario makes his triumphant return in what could easily be the best game of all time

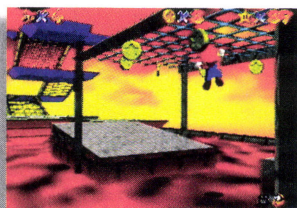
Publisher: Nintendo of America

Platform: Nintendo⁶⁴

Format: 64 Megabit Cartridge

Developer: Nintendo Co. Ltd.

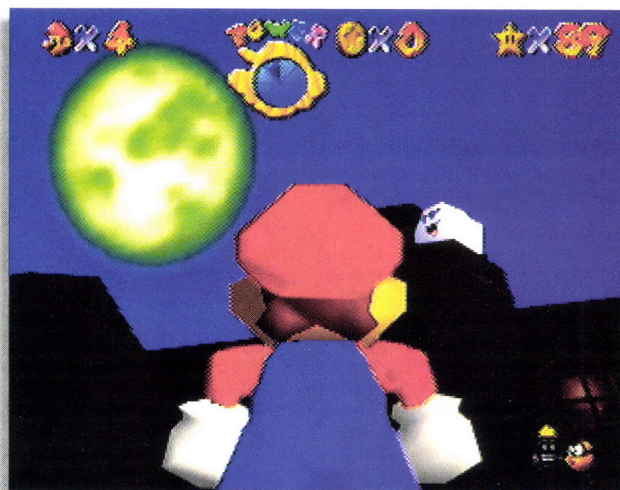
Release: September 30



Each world is constructed in amazingly perfect Miyamoto-style, and Mario has more gameplay techniques than you could shake a Bandicoot at.

If Shigeru Miyamoto is, as *Time* magazine suggested, the Steven Spielberg of the video game business, Mario is Nintendo's John Travolta—a leading man poised to make a dramatic comeback after lurking in the shadows following a string of successful endeavors.

Following almost two years of development, it appears as if Nintendo has undergone a thorough evolution of perspective. For two-dimensional action-exploration games, they have Donkey Kong and Yoshi sequels forthcoming, they've used Mario to spearhead their entrance into the world of 3-D adventure gaming. True fans of the Mario series will find Yoshi's Island to be the closest to the old Mario they'll come for some time—Super Mario 64 is one part Super Mario World, one part Legend of Zelda and two parts entirely new virtual-reality experience. The result is a product which feels entirely unlike anything a person has played before, save for a handful of familiar symbols, enemies and landmarks taken from previous Mario adventures; including exclamation blocks, little brown Goombas, Koopa turtles and yes, large and small mushrooms



scattered here and there.

You begin the game in the most passive of environments—a lush green garden outside of a huge, brightly colored castle—and there are no enemies, nor pointing arrows, nor any time limit to prevent you from exploring everything quite thoroughly at your leisure. If you so desire, you can run over a hill to the right and jump into a pond, walk down a sandy path to a fenced-off waterfall, or over a bridge to look straight at the castle's front door or into its moat. Should you opt to vault over the fence, swim

the first experience you have in the world of Super Mario 64: You could spend a lot of time just looking around, having fun and finding hidden things without even accomplishing your first task in the simplest map in the game. Moreover, even when you've thoroughly explored that area, you'll be coming back later to find something new to do there. Even a casual player can look forward to spending up to five hours completing all of the objectives in a single location.

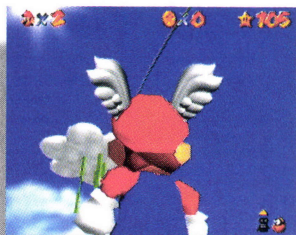
Yet, such is the case with each of the game's 15 plus

Super Mario 64 is one part Super Mario World, one part Zelda and two parts entirely new experience.

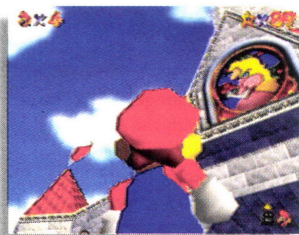
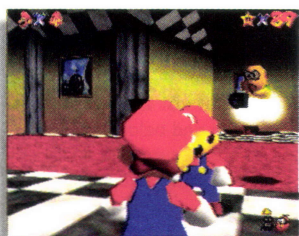
through the pond or jump off of that bridge, you can swim through the moat and discover underwater doors and gratings which you cannot yet open.

Outside, you can explore everything but accomplish only one thing—everything save the main door of the castle is but a diversion as you begin your adventure. Without revealing any more than that, there's a lesson to be learned from even

areas, which range in climate from flaming heat to freezing cold and everything in between. Most of the classic Mario World themes reappear in 3-D, including spooky supernatural Ghost Houses, life-sized pyramids and secret passages through clouds in the sky, and there are all sorts of new objects and items that can be used to navigate through them. Before considering those objects, however, it's



▶ What would a Mario game be if the little Italian couldn't fly? This time it's a winged cap that takes him around, and there are several stages throughout the game where Mario can locate these caps inside of red exclamation blocks. Getting into the air requires either a successfully completed triple jump or an explosive discharge from a cannon; staying airborne forces you to balance your flight upward with the gravity that pulls you into unexpected ground dives.



Mario 64 offers a multitude of camera options, including the stand-still "Mario-view" perspective used to look around Mario's immediate surroundings. Thank God for Lakitu!

important to note the variety of moves Mario possesses at the inception.

It's easy enough to use Mario's old moves—running with the analog joystick and jumping with the A button are simple enough—but there are so many other things you'll

One difference between Mario 64 and its predecessor is the noticeable infrequency of floating blocks.

want and need to do. Perhaps the biggest surprise is Mario's B "attack" button, which throws a simple little punch or kick in whatever direction you're pointing, and the Z trigger button underneath the joystick serves as a modifier—press it before a jump and Mario will crouch down before doing a backflip; press it after the jump and



Beautiful underwater areas are full of highly realistic lighting effects. Put on headphones and lock a door to get lost in it all...



The Treehouse Team at Nintendo's 1996 E3 press briefing (from left to right, Ken Lobb, Isaac Marshall and Henry Sterchi).

Introducing Nintendo's Treehouse!

It may not be the murky depths of Loch Ness or the fabled hanger at Area 51, but Nintendo's Treehouse is certainly the most mysterious location in the world of video games. The Treehouse is the last stop for Nintendo games before they reach market. It is a place where 10 of the best video gamers in the world play games through, then decide the finishing touches that separate average games from extraordinary ones.

At first glance, the Treehouse is no different than any other area at NoA. It consists of an oblong office with several computer stations and a small conference room with a huge television. In this case, appearances are deceiving.

The computers are game stations capable of playing prereleased versions of Super NES and Nintendo64 games. You never know who you might see walking around the office. On the day that *Intelligent Gamer* visited the Treehouse, Alexey Pajitnov, the creator of Tetris, was working at one of the stations.

Ken Lobb, Nintendo's development and evaluation manager, and Isaac Marshall, a product evaluator, agreed to meet with *IG* to describe what life is like in the Treehouse.

IG: What exactly does the Treehouse do for Nintendo?

KL: What we do is look for concepts being developed by second parties

that look very strong. As the concept goes along, we feed them ideas. When the game nears completion, we feed them lots of tweaks.

[We point out ideas such as] maybe this guy should jump three pixels farther or, this enemy is in the wrong place... little things that make games significantly better when you come down to the final product.

IM: And this is all very important when you're doing video games, and everyone in our department has experience doing it. It really is about digging into the game, knowing the game inside out and knowing what small things are going to make the game better.

Another big part of what Nintendo does differently from

better games that way. We're perfectly willing to take a game and just say, "completely rework this." Sure it's going to take eight more months. So what? The game will be better when we're finished.

IG: Is Tree House exclusive to Nintendo titles or is the service available for outside developers as well?

KL: Just exclusive for Nintendo titles. When I say Nintendo titles, I mean titles that will be released by Nintendo. That includes titles coming out of NCL as well as some of the second-party developers that we're working with where we will use an outside developer to release products that will be under the Nintendo name.

IG: Does Nintendo in Japan have its own version of the Treehouse?

KL: Not necessarily because they have R&D groups. They're doing [the same kind of work] in-house in R&D. Because we don't do in-house R&D, it's very different here. I

"What we do is look for concepts being developed by second parties that look very strong." —Ken Lobb

everyone else is that our schedules are always very flexible. I mean, to some extent there is no schedule until a game approaches beta.

A lot of the stuff we work on, our PR team doesn't know about. We don't tell PR and marketing and sales because as soon as we do, there's this pressure to meet a certain date. If we don't tell them until we are positive of that date, it's much easier on the development staff. We always end up with

don't know the exact number of people who worked on Mario 64, but from what I understand, it's around a pretty large number, maybe 40 people or so.

I know for a fact that Mr. Miyamoto (Shigeru Miyamoto, creator of the very successful Donkey Kong, Zelda, and Mario) is very open to receiving ideas from any source, especially the people he really trusts who are working for him within his group.



Big, bad, green meanie Bowser is back, and you'll have to fight him three times during the game to win. Speaking of green, can you find Yoshi?

Mario will come down from the air in a Hip Drop (butt) attack reminiscent of Yoshi's body attack in Yoshi's Island. Mario can still crouch down, grab, pick up and throw objects, climb on fences and swim, too.

Then there are his really new

Mario 64's success or failure will depend on the ability of players to get used to the four camera view buttons.

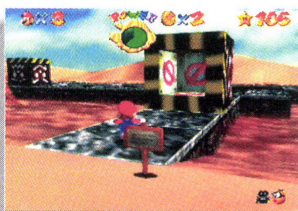
moves. He can crawl on the ground, scale walls like a secret agent, sweep kick, slide tackle and dive through the air at full speed, not to mention climbing up and down poles, doing handstands and mid-air 360s that will twist your head around in astonishment. Double and triple jumps—in succession rather than as continuations of the first jump—give Mario the chance to go higher if he can find enough room to build up a run, and both side jumps and off-the-wall jumps allow him to unexpectedly reach new heights in close quarters. He even has a special long jump that can send him flying far forward.

The biggest change players will notice from previous Mario adventures is the presence of

a set of four dedicated camera buttons—up and down zoom in and out from a few distances, and left and right shift the camera 45 or 90 degrees around the Mario character. Super Mario 64's success or failure will largely depend on the ability of players to accustom themselves to the presence of these buttons. Although the buttons give you an unprecedented freedom to view the world in the way you want to see it, they also remove from the programmers some responsibility for showing you the easiest path to travel. In the early stages, the camera tends to turn automatically to show you the best way to go, but as you move on to the later levels, you'll find yourself

forced to turn the camera every now and then to give yourself a fighting chance to survive.

Another difference between Super Mario 64 and its predecessors is the noticeable infrequency of blocks you'll need to break with your head—previously, smashing bricks and finding coins and items hidden therein was a major theme of Mario games. Nintendo has simply changed the equation for SM64, which is the main reason the game feels a lot like the Legend of Zelda. You shan't need to find a mushroom to grow huge or lose your size or life after getting hit by an enemy—



Everywhere he goes, Mario must avoid dangers in his environment. In the desert, huge blocks threaten to smush him; in a snow level, water freezes and injures him.

Mario's U.S. Version?

KL: There were significant differences between Mario 64 at E3 and the Mario 64 that shipped. Mr. Miyamoto did many things to the game in two weeks, and they're tiny. I mean a lot of them are the type of things where if someone had played the entire E3 version then played the entire final version they might have gone, "Gee, I saw a lot of different textures." But there was a lot more to it than that. Very subtle changes. And they made the game significantly better than what it was.

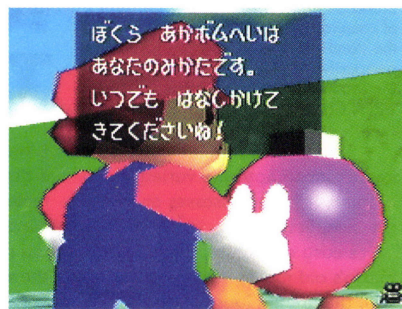
IG: What were some of the changes?

KL: There's so many I can barely describe them. I mean the way you jump out of the water was changed. In a couple of levels, he moved around where you'd find Bombom and where you find the

cent mark. We're going to spend that last 20 percent tweaking and balancing and shifting things around and trying to make it just right.

IG: Has NCL made many changes in the English version of Mario 64?

KL: There's always the prerequisite text changes. You'll be surprised with the American version of Mario. A rather large amount of voice has been added. A very large amount of voice actually.



IM: Too much voice.

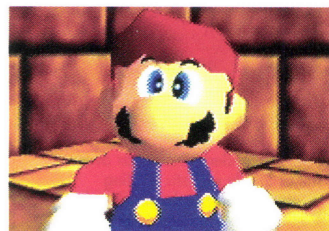
KL: A surprisingly large amount of voice. Typically NCL games are so good that it's really difficult to make them significantly better. Also, NCL is just so good with the management of their memory that when the game is done it's packed. Mario

is an exception. When Mario was finished in Japan there was some memory left...yes, memory left on a 64 Megabit cartridge. I mean some people thought the game was going to be 96 Megabit, but it's not even 64 Megabit in Japan. It's very close.

They were able to go back and put in some compressed voice, and again there's a lot. If you've played the Japanese version you'll be very surprised at some of the changes.

We had played the E3 version to death. I mean, that was the first version we really got our hands on. When we received the final Japanese version, we were surprised to see so many changes.

I think it's one of the things that sets NCL (Nintendo Co. Ltd.) apart. A lot of companies will get to the point where they simply say the game is done and ship it. To Nintendo, that's the 80 per-



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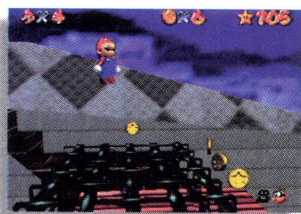
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A rippling pool of liquid chrome invites Mario to take his first stainless steel bath. Upon diving in, Mario can find the exclamation block which makes him metal.

Some scenes (above) give Mario freedom to run around and leisurely explore wide-open outdoor areas. Others are indoors and are filled with huge traps.

Mario stands in the same proportion to his surroundings for the vast majority of the game, and has an eight-piece pie-chart life bar which appears now and

roles on three different systems, even Mario's ability to fly has evolved dramatically: In Super Mario 3, he became a flying raccoon; Mario World, a true Super Mario with a yellow cap; and now in Mario 64, he wears a cap with feathered wings which allows him to fly for extended times. At other points in the game, Mario's metal cap allows him to transform into a chrome-covered invincible warrior, and a translucent one

Nothing has been sacred through Mario's previous adventures, and changes have been made here, too.

then at the top of the screen.

Nothing, though, has been sacred through Mario's previous adventures. Mario couldn't use fireballs in Super Mario 2 (U.S.) and wasn't spending most of his time breaking bricks. Through his most recent three starring

gives him the power to walk through certain walls and fences. As was the case in Nintendo's portable Wario Land, you can even combine the caps to increase versatility.

Though the symbolism may not have been intentional, Super Mario 64 is itself a story of

Mario's ability to wear many new hats at once—this time, he's not only a mascot, but a 3-D pioneer and thus a walking set of gambling chips that Nintendo has placed on a virtual casino table. We happen to agree with Nintendo that this bet is not only important to their company but to gamers as a whole, as it near perfectly sets out the building blocks from which future 3-D experiences should be constructed. Super Mario 64 gives its players more options, depth and techniques to master than ever before, but does so without confusing them—in fact,



Complex desert scenes show off Mario Team's expertise with creating realistic 3-D environments. The outside of this pyramid gives Mario a place to get stuck in the sand; the inside is full of staircases and labyrinthine paths.

Cancelled Games

By comparison to their competitors, Nintendo is known for at least two unusual corporate behaviors: First, they release far fewer in-house games in a given year than other hardware manufacturers such as Sega and Sony, and second, they very rarely release bad software.

The temptation to alter either of those behaviors is staggering. Products with the Nintendo label benefit from strong consumer confidence and the backing of Nintendo's solid advertising force, which helps to guarantee that every Nintendo game is a hit on at least some level. If they realize that anything they push out will be accepted by the public, why doesn't Nintendo just release more games and spend less time making them perfect?

IG: Can you name any games that you've had to change significantly?

KL: That might not be politically correct. There is one story I could probably tell you about. When I started at Nintendo, I'd been here for about six to nine months, I saw Yoshi's Island. This was in 1993.

It wasn't the same Yoshi's Island that was shipped. They continued to change that game and add things and on and on and on until it was Yoshi's Island.

After that, the game was great. Any company would have taken that and said, 'This is the best game we've ever made. Ship it.' And yet to Mr. Miyamoto it was like, 'We can make this better. Spend more time. Spend more time. Spend more time. Finally it's the pinnacle of perfection. Okay, ship it.'

You know, one of the things I believe about the industry is that except for a few notable cases, there are no bad game



Yoshi's Island was among the most-changed games ever to arrive at Treehouse. The sequel is on its way for the N64.

developers. There are game developers who are put under too much time pressure...not given enough time, or not given enough resources, or don't use enough manpower because of those first two reasons.

It's just that too many developers are put under the 'Here's a spec, you have eight months. I'm giving you enough money so that you can use five people.' What do you get? You get a C grade game.

If you take that same developer and you say, 'I'm gonna give you 14 months. What do you think it's gonna take? Fifteen people? We'll fund you enough for 15 people.' Out pops a game that's brilliant.

IG: Have you ever had to pull the rug out from under a game and just say no, this thing can't go out?

KL: We've done it. Since I've been here we've done it six or eight times. I will not tell you what those games are.

IG: Does that mean they have gone out eventually?

KL: Never. I'm talking about six to eight games we spent large quantities of money and time on and we just came to the point where we said, 'This game is not good enough for us, let's cut our losses.'

And I'm not talking about little amounts of money either. Again, it's a willingness to say, this is our level of acceptance, and it's very high. If a game is not there, and we've tried and tried and it doesn't make it there, it's a million dollars down the drain. So what? It's our face that we're talking about. It's the quality of the Nintendo label that really matters.



Shigeru Miyamoto (right) plays plenty of games to get inspiration for his own. Here he's trying Sony's Jet Moto.

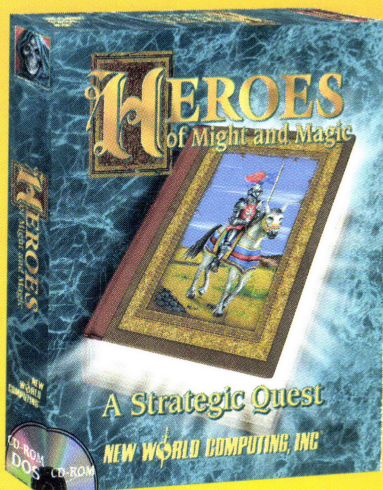
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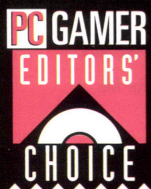


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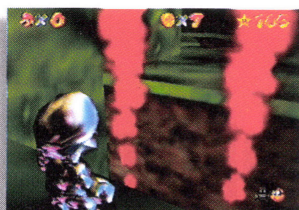
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the first 10 hours spent with the game will likely involve plenty of laughter, surprises and excitement, and the next 20 to 80 hours will be full of surmountable challenges and increasingly daunting objectives. Considering that most games nowadays are good for two or three hours of play at best, the lasting power, gameplay and concepts laid out in Super Mario 64 are nothing short of astonishing benchmarks that future games must live up to. The question is, will they?

ig



Fire effects are handled beautifully in Mario because of the N64's antialiasing and clipping abilities; liquid lava flows as smoothly as huge floor-mounted torches burn.

GRAPHICS:

- + Unbelievably convincing 3-D worlds are full of life and color.
- + No pop-up, no flicker, no pixelization, no... (you get the point)

SOUNDS:

- + Koji Kondo does it again, with a truly inspiring soundtrack (for a cart).
- + Sound effects are remarkably realistic.

GAMEPLAY:

- + Words cannot express how ingenious the gameplay is. Tons of variety, tons of technique... this is vintage Miyamoto.

LASTING POWER:

- + Few will be able to find all 120 stars without some kind of help...
- + Lasts longer than most RPGs.

OVERALL

HIGHLY
RECOMMENDED

A+

Becoming Part of the Treehouse

Nintendo of America employs hundreds of game counselors and testers, and it routinely brings in groups of local gamers from near Seattle, Wash. to play through and comment on their upcoming games.

Yet, as Ken Lobb explains, of the hundreds of employed Nintendo game players, only 10 people qualify for the special distinctions that Treehouse and Tree Branch members receive. These are the people who can fine-tune a game to perfection, giving it that special feeling so distinctive to Nintendo's internal products.

IG: Is this one office the entire Treehouse?

KL: There's a separate office on the other side of the hall, another room with a locked door. That's what we call the Tree Branch.



Tetrisphere (N64 version shown) is one of the games presently being tested extensively in the Treehouse. Ken's the in-house champion.

IG: (To Marshall) Is that where you started?

KL: No, he was lucky. Actually Isaac came in prior to the Tree Branch. The Tree Branch was formed basically with Donkey Kong Country.

IG: What does it take to get into the Treehouse? Are all your guys really brilliant gamers?

KL: You have to know games like the elite half percent. And it's not just knowing games, you have to love them.

There's definitely a skill involved with the people that we bring into the Treehouse. When they're shown a game that most people would call good, they can tell me how they would make it better. Even a bad game—they know how to make it better.

You can ask any 12-year-old who's just played this game how

he would make it better. 'Oh, I'd add 20 levels, and I'd have a bunch more enemies, and there'd be more music...' FAIL!

The real skill is knowing how to take a product and do very tiny things to it to make it better. I think this is the type of thing that very few people can do. And that's the skill we look for: can you do the last 20 percent? Especially in our group, where we work with brilliant outside developers, we don't come up with concepts as a rule here.

IG: How many folks are in the Treehouse?

KL: Gee, since we just got a couple of new guys let me think for a second. There's six...seven, eight, nine, 10. Ten now.

IG: We take it that Donkey Kong Country marked a significant expansion in Treehouse activity.

KL: That was the Treehouse. The reason I came to Nintendo basically was because of this beautiful box [holds up a N64]. I was enticed here with this spec. They were like, here's what we're doing. We're going to form a group to try to get some Western developers to make games for this. And it was like, wow that's really cool, you know, I need to do this.

About three weeks after I came here, I went to a JAMMA meeting in Japan and I met Tim and Chris Stamper. Tim, Chris, myself and a couple of other gentlemen went to NCL and they pulled out this cartridge. They plugged it into a Super NES, turned it on, and it was

level one of Donkey Kong Country finished 100 percent. I mean it had everything.

I almost fell out of my chair. I mean, Donkey Kong Country was obviously leaps and bounds beyond everything else, and I thought okay we have the N64, that's why I joined the company, and all of a sudden bam, here's this 16-Bit game which is just phenomenal.

I.M. I think that Donkey Kong Country was probably one of the most interesting yet intriguing moments for me because it was maybe two or three months after I got here, they sprang the game on us.

They showed it to us. And we were just amazed by it. I mean there was nothing out there like it. We played it. We spent several nights living here.

KL: At the time we sprang it on them it was 75 percent done. We kind of held it back. We'd make them play all these other games, make them learn the ropes of the way we wanted the Treehouse to function, and all of a sudden it was like here we want you guys to play this game. Bing!

I.M: But you know every once in a while we'd hear drum beats. [Marshall pounds the bongo theme from the beginning of Donkey Kong Country on a table.]

KL: We'd shut the doors and pull down the curtains so that you guys couldn't see. We were really evil.

I.M: You guys were evil.



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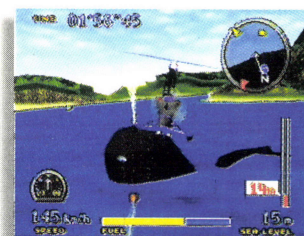
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▶ Many of the game's most exciting moments come when you're flying the gyrocopter, as you can launch missiles into water, air and...well, yes, friendly smiling whales. It's easier than using a net.



PilotWings 64

Nintendo and Paradigm take the magic of PilotWings to the next level

Publisher: Nintendo of America

Platform: Nintendo⁶⁴

Format: 64 Megabit Cartridge

Developer: Paradigm

Release: September 30

One of the key differences between Nintendo's Super Famicom (SNES) and Famicom (NES) was the former machine's ability to handle an early form of 3-D graphics, namely the rotation or scaling of a single background layer as character sprites were moved around on-screen. When it was time to launch the Super Famicom in Japan six years ago, Nintendo was set to show off the graphics feature which came to be known as Mode 7 with the racing title F-Zero and the light-hearted flight simulation PilotWings, and though both titles were popular, Nintendo opted to wait to release sequels for either until there was new hardware available to make them look more impressive than before.

For PilotWings, that day has now come. Turning to Dallas, Texas-based Paradigm Simulations (profiled in *IG's Fusion*, issue 9) for their expertise in Silicon Graphics workstation-based flight simulations, Nintendo found an ally capable of using the \$250 Nintendo⁶⁴ to replicate the visuals formerly possible on multithousand-dollar SGI machines. With the guidance of an oversight team watched over by the company's venerable Shigeru Miyamoto, Nintendo had their second most important piece of launch software completed for them out-of-house.

Rather than creating flight simulations where you learn how to control one vehicle, Nintendo decided to give players a variety of missions to complete using five or more separate vehicles. The first game focused on events that would look impressive even with simple



▶ One of PilotWings' most impressive moments is this fast-paced hang glider flight scene where you rush down a stream path cut into the mountains and attempt to go through as many hoops as you can manage.

scaling or rotation serving as the backdrops—skydiving, biplaning or rocket belting through hoops made of floating balls, and later using a helicopter to go on rescue missions. PilotWings 64 starts you with a hang glider, rocket belt and

take on the old skydiving and a new device called the Jumble Hopper, robotic boots which let you jump around through the air. After choosing one of six characters (three males and females each of light, medium and heavy weights) to pilot your

Like its predecessor, the name of the game in PilotWings 64 is purely "fun," and fun it is.

gyrocopter, replacing the floating balls with rings of tiny spinning pyramids and improving the simple scaling and rotation with fully polygonal environments. In addition, four additional modes of transportation open up as you complete missions with the core three—the first is a free-flying birdman outfit similar to the bonus stages in the original game, the next is a human cannonball event, followed by an improved

vehicle, you're given a quick briefing and are put out to fly.

Like its predecessor, the name of the game in PilotWings 64 is purely "fun," though you are given timed and structured missions to complete through every part of the game. Most tasks require you to launch off—a simple task if you're jumping off of a mountain with the hang glider or using the vertical take off engines of the rocket belt, but more complex when you're



▶ Bonus stages are whimsical romps in outlandish devices. Here, the birdman costume gives you unlimited flight time to explore worlds full of secret places.



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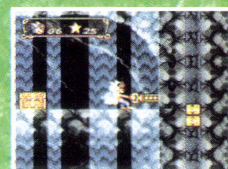
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-Nintendo Power Magazine



Once upon a time, there were three little pigs...



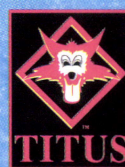
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-Nintendo Power Magazine



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Rocket pack missions are now complete with hoops made from spinning pyramids and translucent green circles. The visual effects do a far better job of conveying a sense of three-dimensional motion than was ever possible in the previous Pilotwings title, and the N64 makes everything look smooth.

using the gyrocopter—fly through some rings or complete an alternative objective, and then land on a strip or bull's-eye located somewhere on the map.

When you're in the gyrocopter, you can expect to use an early mission simply to take off, fly through some hoops and make your way back to the landing strip, but in later missions you'll chase a robotic menace through the countryside and hit him with onboard missiles, take out bull's-eye targets in a canyon and plenty more. The rocket pack missions test your ability to fly precisely through designated areas filled with hoops, targets and huge floating balloons—some missions give you a colorful goal



An improved version of the old rocket pack enables you to explore the levels so long as you have fuel to spare. Hidden stars (above) let you become the bird-man on whatever stage you visit.

and have you repeatedly slam yourself against a giant ball to get it into the basket area. The hang glider is perhaps the most odd of the core vehicles, as when you're not going through hoops, you're on "photo" missions which give you a sample picture and ask you to use six exposures to come your closest

In later missions you'll chase a robotic menace through the countryside and chase him with missiles...

to replicating that perfect scene. After you take the pictures, you glance through a photo album to see how you've scored, which just seems weird as you realize you're being graded on photography by a computer. Regardless, the mission variety is greater than it was in Pilotwings, and it's all in the name of family enjoyment.

Though the fun to be had in Pilotwings was primarily in the completion of the tasks, the scenery in PilotWings 64 is gorgeous and detailed enough that you can enjoy yourself simply by flying aimlessly through the maps and looking around...or in the case of the gyrocopter, flying through the world and blasting everything you see with missiles! In Pilotwings, the maps were flat; in PW64, you can fly through mountain ranges, explore hidden caves, and go eyeball-to-mist-drop with waterfalls, not to mention flying through cities, landing in rural fields and going off-shore to check out oil rigs, whales and motorboats. We have to go on record as saying

that PilotWings 64's graphics are the most realistic seen to date on a home console, though we're a bit depressed that only Mario is set to come close to PVW64's level as of today.

A speck in the distance can become a city as you move closer, then the most realistic city you've ever seen in a game, complete with fully detailed streets, buildings and bridges. Specialized N64 features from MIP-mapping to load management allowed Paradigm and Nintendo to avoid "pop-up" almost altogether, keeping your immediate surroundings exceptionally detailed while retaining enough polygons in the distance to remain convincing.

Several impressive spot effects also become possible, as well—engine trails on your missiles look wholly believable instead of multiple puffs of smoke, clouds pass through your vision and fade away, and huge translucent wind currents will swirl around in proper perspective—the best part of the Nintendo64 appears to be its ability to make or simulate rounded edges for cones, tubes and spheres, each of which

ant and the gameplay—though varied—is neither terribly addictive nor advanced significantly over the original SNES Pilotwings title. With the exception of the nicely balanced gyrocopter, the new events are fantastic-looking but have simple play mechanics that are fun but mostly help to quickly demonstrate the N64's graphic abilities.

PilotWings 64 is one of those rare games that groups of gamers should gather to play, but whether its unique audio and gameplay will hold those crowds is open to debate.

ig



Little graphic details make the difference. Air currents animate perfectly; Mt. Rushmore is wild.

GRAPHICS:

- + The best 3-D graphics ever in a flight simulation.
- + Every effect is believable and the worlds are more complex than ever before.

SOUNDS:

- + Pleasant tunes and effects...
- +/- ...which sound only a little better than a SNES game.

GAMEPLAY:

- + Plenty of tasks, vehicles and secrets to find.
- +/- While 90 percent is fun, parts lack Nintendo's magical gameplay structure.

LASTING POWER:

- + Lots and lots to do, redo and explore at your leisure. Truly open environments to comb through.
- Will you want to replay sections you've completed just for the score?

OVERALL

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

A+

B+

A-

A-

A-



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▶ The debonair Mr. Habu dressed up specially for today's lesson in Shogi, a built-in tutorial on how to best play the game. The board itself (far right) is not as distinctive as that used for chess.



Saikyo Habu Shogi

The Nintendo⁶⁴'s first third-party release underwhelms but still plays well

Publisher: Seta of Japan

Platform: Nintendo⁶⁴

Format: 64 Megabit Cartridge

Developer: Seta of Japan

Release: Now (Japan)

There's quite a bit of mystery surrounding Seta's release of the third Japanese Nintendo⁶⁴ launch title, Saikyo Habu Shogi—after all, most companies try to launch new game machines with software that clearly demonstrates their specialized audiovisual abilities, and screenshots are enough to prove that this one doesn't come close to doing that.

But it plays a more than competent game of Shogi, which looks and feels like a chess game played on an unchecked board with Japanese-lettered tiles. Like chess, you have pawns, knights and kings, and you advance upon an opponent

promotional materials, manual and box, Habu surprisingly lent Seta more than his face—he offers tutorial lessons and sample games alongside the game's standard player versus player and player versus CPU gameplay.

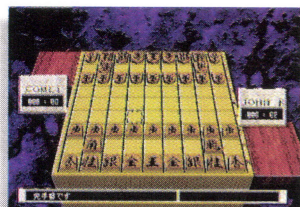
Perhaps the single most impressive Shogi feature is the high-resolution mode used to display its graphics, including many different images of Habu himself and a group of artificial opponents. Having said that, if you're looking for hot graphics on the Nintendo⁶⁴, look elsewhere: Saikyo Habu's most exciting effects are infrequent instances of board rotation and one selection screen in which some Killer Instinct-style scaling

give N⁶⁴ owners confidence in third-party licensing being done on their behalf, it delivers a fine game of Shogi and achieves at minimal levels for a first-generation table game.

ig



▲ An extremely Japanese options screen allows you to pick from different sorts of games, Shogi lessons and various opponents. Most screens here are static.



Surprisingly, none of the Nintendo⁶⁴'s special graphics features are used here. The default board (above), title screen and all other graphics are in high-res.

It may not look great, but Saikyo Habu does play a more than competent game of Japanese Shogi.

located on the opposite side of the table. Unlike chess, once you capture one of your enemy's pieces, you can use a turn to place that piece back on the board as a member of your army, and there is a more thorough system of piece promotion in place as well. Though some of the pieces can be moved in the same manner as you would expect to move in chess, others are more limited—pawns cannot capture on diagonals and get no two-square first move bonus, for example.

Yoshiharu Habu, a Japanese Shogi grand-master likened in ability to reigning chess champion Garry Kasparov and the greatest yokozunas in the history of Sumo wrestling, actually plays a role in the game's design. Pictured prominently on the game's

clouds zoom out at you as you choose a CPU opponent. Otherwise, there's not much to look at besides the standard flat Shogi board and an extremely limited 3-D version which is devoid of any sort of special 3-D effects. Audio is above average in that there is full and clear digitized play-by-play, but the music offered up by Seta is behind even SNES levels in any possible evaluable terms.

Despite its bland appearance, the Super Famicom version of Shogi today remains in the top 25 percent of rated games for that platform. Why? The gameplay was fine and the graphics were competent. Though Saikyo Habu Shogi is neither an impressive demonstration of the Nintendo⁶⁴'s abilities nor a game that will

GRAPHICS:

- +/- Better graphics than one might expect from a 16-Bit system.
- Entirely underwhelming visuals and almost no use of 64-Bit visual powers.

SOUNDS:

- + Excellent digitized play-by-play (in Japanese voice).
- Decidedly mediocre music which does nothing to impress the player.

GAMEPLAY:

- + For a Shogi game, Saikyo Habu is both fast and smart.
- + For Shogi fans only.

LASTING POWER:

- + Worth playing repeatedly if you're a fan of table games.
- Not a title you'll be playing all the time.

OVERALL

RECOMMENDED

B

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Q Is it possible to upgrade your PlayStation to a 6X CD-ROM? If so, please let me know how much it costs to upgrade and where you can buy it. Thanks!

Winston V. Cao
Bronx, NY

A Though it would seem logical that you could speed up your PlayStation's loading time by popping a new CD-ROM mechanism inside the machine, it won't work. There's no official modification being offered by Sony, nor are there any unofficial modifications we've heard of. We also feel it's strongly inadvisable to consider opening up your machine and playing with the CD-ROM mechanism. Even if Sony had made an official announcement about such a product, which they have not, it would likely be a new system and not a CD mechanism upgrade for old hardware.



Q Isn't the PlayStation beautiful? Well, it wouldn't look so if you took a huge chainsaw to it and ripped out the bloody CD drive.

Q I was wondering if you were going to have more in-depth coverage of Namco's Soul Edge II video game? I understand that it will be coming to the PS in Aug/Sept. in Japan. The new improvements in Ver. II are excellent. Do you have any additional info/pictures and/or are you going to do any additional coverage in the coming months? Thank you for your time.

Brad Brunett
Garden City, MI

A Just to clear up any potential confusion before it begins, Namco's recent Soul Edge



Q Brad Brunett inquires about Namco's "Soul Edge II," which is actually not a sequel but just an upgraded version of the original Soul Edge. This version will be released for the PlayStation.

upgrade is not a sequel to Soul Edge nor is it officially being called Soul Edge II; Namco's name for the enhanced version of the product is Soul Edge Version ("Ver.") II, and the content change is somewhat of a parallel to Capcom's Street Fighter II Champion Edition. As you no doubt have seen in arcades already, there are improved color schemes and moves, two new playable characters (the pirate Cervantes and the Asian swordsman Hwang), an improved opening and some new background artwork. As the game only adds a bit to its earlier version, arcade owners can easily upgrade Soul Edge Version I machines with the latest ROMs, and Namco does indeed intend to include all of Version II's features in the home port. We're very anxious to see the home version in the next few months.

Q I've heard a number of rumors about a new N64 game, TopGear Rally. I played TopGear 2 on the SNES and it was great. As soon as you get any info or pics about it, please let us know.

Jason Music
San José, Costa Rica

A We're excited, too. Kemco has made no announcements in the U.S. as of press time, but the game was announced in Japan

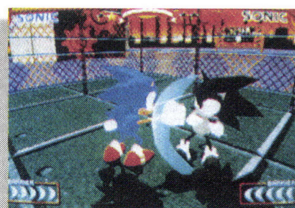


Q Kemco's first N64 game in Japan is Blade and Barrel, which will be released in the United States by GT Interactive as Ultra Combat. Software Creations developed the title in the United Kingdom.

already and we have very high hopes for it. Their other announced title, Blade and Barrel, is a helicopter action game that supports either single- or two-player gaming, and the company is said to be preparing roughly three other titles.

Q Is Sega's Sonic The Fighters arcade game running on Titan hardware or Model 2 hardware? Sega is putting the game in Titan arcade cabinets, but every source until now has stated it was a Model 2 game. Any info on this would be appreciated.

Scott Spencer
Phoenix, NY



Q Sega's upcoming Model 2 fighting game, Sonic the Fighters (tentative name) is more powerful than a raw Saturn title—the backgrounds will be flattened for the Japanese Saturn translation.

A Sonic The Fighters is a Model 2 game, unlike the Titan-based Virtua Fighter Kids. As a consequence, expect STF to require a bit of extra translation time—we've had a beta version of VF Kids in-house for some time already because its arcade hardware is Saturn compatible.

Q I have heard a million different responses from different sources, but I'm still going to ask you: Are U.S. Nintendo64 games compatible with the Japanese Nintendo64? I can't wait for Sept. 30, and was probably going to mail-order a system anyway. Any suggestions? Thanks!

Adam Poulos
New Hartford, NY

A We have received unofficial confirmation that initial shipments of the Nintendo64 hardware will be compatible from Japan to North America, which appears to support our strong suspicions that making machines incompatible (read: manufacturing different system ROM chips) might be too time-consuming for the busy folks at Nintendo nowadays. As even the Japanese hardware is covered in English (save for a couple of mixed English and Japanese stickers inside and on the bottom of the unit), it appears that Nintendo may wait to change the system ROMs at least until the second wave of mass-manufactured N64s hits North America. Nothing has been 100 percent confirmed, however, as Nintendo traditionally makes no official statements on the subject of country-to-country compatibility.



Q Will Nintendo64 hardware be compatible across continents? Though IG has heard "yes," we looked inside the machine and found a mysterious little plastic part specially marked for Japan...

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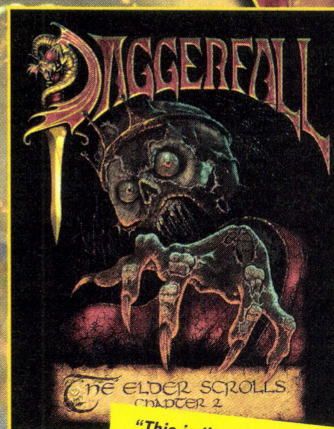
TES: Daggerfall is one of the most ambitious computer games ever devised. This is no dungeon hack, no bit of fluff with medieval trappings. *Daggerfall*'s world is twice the size of Great Britain, filled with people, adventures, and scenery as real as reality. This is a world designed to allow you to play the game any way you want. Be the Hero or the Villain... or anything in between.

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—Strategy Plus



Actual IBM screens shown.



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—Trent Ward, PC Gamer



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Q. I was wondering if you all will review an N⁶⁴ and the games (import) either on the Web or in the mag?
Chris Spry
Columbia, MO

A. Hopefully, this issue will answer your question...

Q. What are the titles that will be available for the N⁶⁴ by the end of September?
Marc Baime
Via the Internet

A. As of today, Nintendo apparently intends the following games to be ready for the Sept. 30 U.S. launch of the Nintendo⁶⁴: Super Mario 64, PilotWings 64, Tetrisphere, Cruis'n USA, Shadows of the Empire, WaveRace 64 and Body Harvest. By the end of the year, Killer Instinct 64, Blast Corps, Mortal Kombat Trilogy, Wayne Gretzky Hockey and perhaps Doom 64 and Super Mario Kart R will be available as well.



A. LucasArts' Shadows of the Empire and Nintendo's WaveRace 64 are planned as North American launch titles for the Nintendo⁶⁴. Some rumors have suggested that Shadows will miss the launch, but WaveRace is on track.

A. IG's overseas review of Super Mario 64 begins on page 68, and our reviews of PilotWings 64 and Saikyo Habu Shogi follow on pages 72-76. Is the N⁶⁴ the system to buy? You decide...

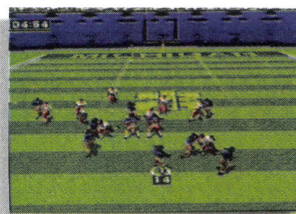
Q. There's been an obvious lack of products from EA Sports for the Saturn, and there have also been all kinds of weird rumors about the relationship between EA and Sega. Does EA not plan to produce any sports games for the Saturn, and if this is the case, why?

Many of us who bought Saturns were, for whatever reason, simply expecting EA to continue producing quality sports games for the Sega 32-Bitter given their track record with Genesis. But this hasn't happened. Did we miss something?

I e-mailed EA with this question a couple of months ago and got no reply from them. Conversely, I have asked questions of other companies (Sega, Data East, etc.) and received prompt and courteous answers. Thanks.

Matso Limtiaco
Seattle, Washington

A. It would have seemed natural for Electronic Arts to publish sports



A. Electronic Arts has found itself fighting for market share following Sony's release of advanced sports simulations such as GameDay and NCAA GameBreaker (above).

games for the Saturn considering the comparative drought of such titles and the heavy competition EA has faced from Sony itself on the PlayStation—

GameDay, FaceOff and Shoot Out were all there waiting for EA, which was part of the reason Madden 96 and NHL '96 were cancelled and NBA Live was rushed to market. So why, then, did EA shun Sega despite their success together in the 16-Bit marketplace? Generally speaking, the issue was money, though the companies will not comment on the record about their reasoning—in essence, it boils down to EA thinking that it could walk away with the PlayStation market and that the Saturn wouldn't be doing too well as of today.

EA signed up with Sony believing that the PlayStation would do better than the Saturn in its first year, and proceeded to make some errors in projecting that they would have an easy time making and selling games for the system. By backing the machine and people they thought would succeed, EA underestimated Sony's ability to deliver a few solid sports titles and opted to spend the time and money to develop a fresh new Madden game rather than doing a quick port of its previously successful 3DO Madden title. Ironically, the redesigned game had some major development snags and only Sony's title came to market, and Sega in the meanwhile never got its Deion Sanders Prime Time Football title out. Whereas EA could have single-handedly dominated the Saturn and gone tit-for-tat on the PlayStation with two ports of the 3DO Madden game, the die was already cast, and they took neither market.

Now, with NFL Quarterback Club '96 as the only other major football title on the way for the Saturn, EA is preparing to release Madden for both of the major 32-Bit systems this fall. See our preview of Madden this issue for more details.

Q. I'm really addicted to Tekken for the PlayStation/arcade and Tekken 2 in the arcade. Tekken 2 for the PlayStation should be great and I can't wait. Should I go ahead and buy an early copy of Tekken 2 from a mail-order house or save my money and buy the game at its U.S. release date?

André DiNardo
Landenberg, PA

A. Many stores import the Japanese versions of games and sell them to Americans prior to the U.S. release. As Japanese versions of games are generally identical to the U.S. versions (except for some text) and come out much earlier, we think that fairly priced imports are often worthwhile purchases, especially with action games. Tekken 2 is very close to U.S. release as of this writing, but purchasing other imports may spur U.S. companies to speed up the "official" releases.

ig



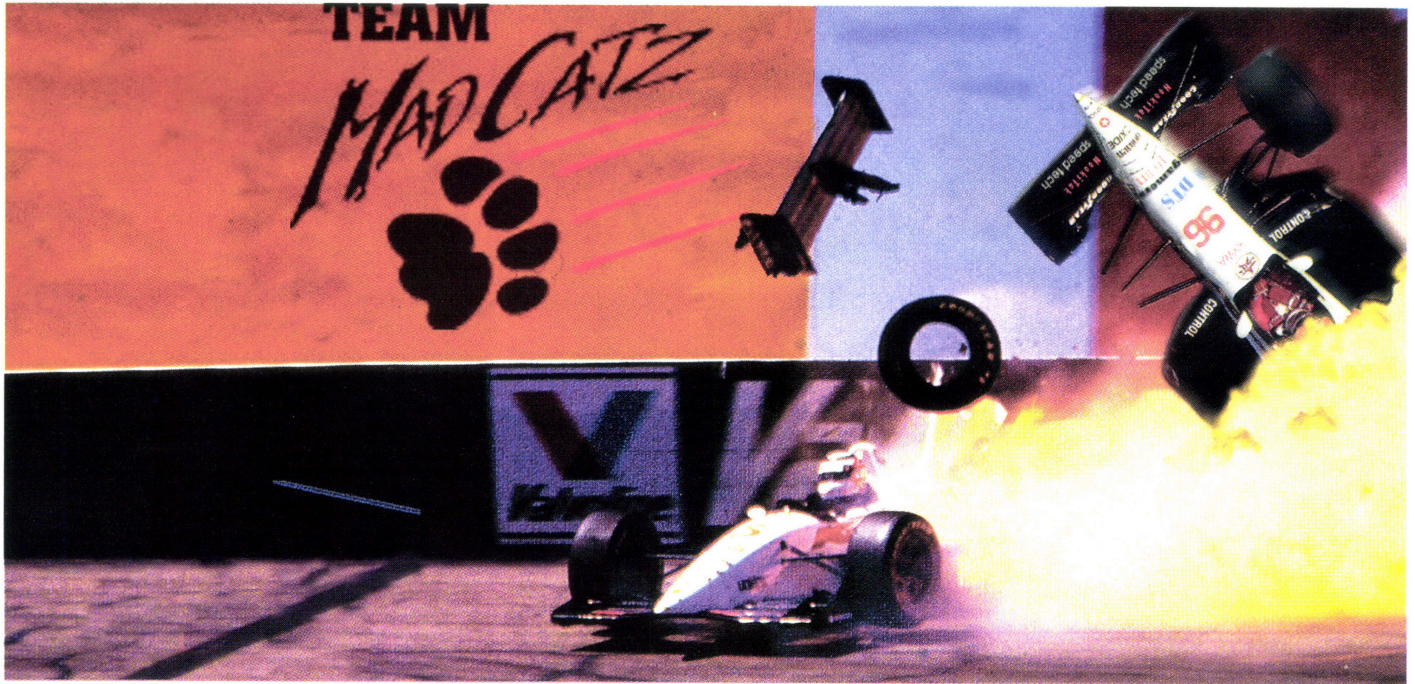
A. Should imported games be considered worthwhile purchases? Though Tekken 2 is about to come out in the States, other imports are often months ahead of their U.S. counterparts.

Send your comments, concepts and theories to:
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CENSORED



Rudy Ray Moore in perhaps his most stunning role as the counter culture bad-ass and night club owner Dolemite. Moore went on to make better films, including *Dolemite 2: The Human Tornado*.



Censorship has always been one of the most controversial topics in video games. From the removal of religious artifacts (like the crosses in the Castlevania games, for example) to the huge uproar over excessive amounts of blood and violence in games like *Mortal Kombat* (can you say "Lieberman?"), the topic of censorship has always been a major cause of debate in the gaming community. Over the years, game magazines have periodically brought forth some of the more prominent censorship incidents in games, and we at IG thought that with this installment of End Notes, we might continue the trend by taking a look at three video game characters who have been censored in one way or another on their road from Japan to the U.S.

ROBIN BANKS of Decathlete

Now your guess is as good as ours as to why this 38-year-old Dolemite-look-alike would be mysteriously absent from the U.S. version of Sega's *Decathlete*. Could it be that the "90s" afro was deemed inappropriate? Or possibly the hip Zebra digs reminded play testers of the jungle? We'll probably never know, but frankly, this editor would use that guy EVERY TIME if he had the chance. He just has "the look," you know?

HOOTER of PilotWings 64

Well, unless you're really in need of some visual excitement in your life, you'll have no problem understanding the reasoning behind this latest censorship issue. As the

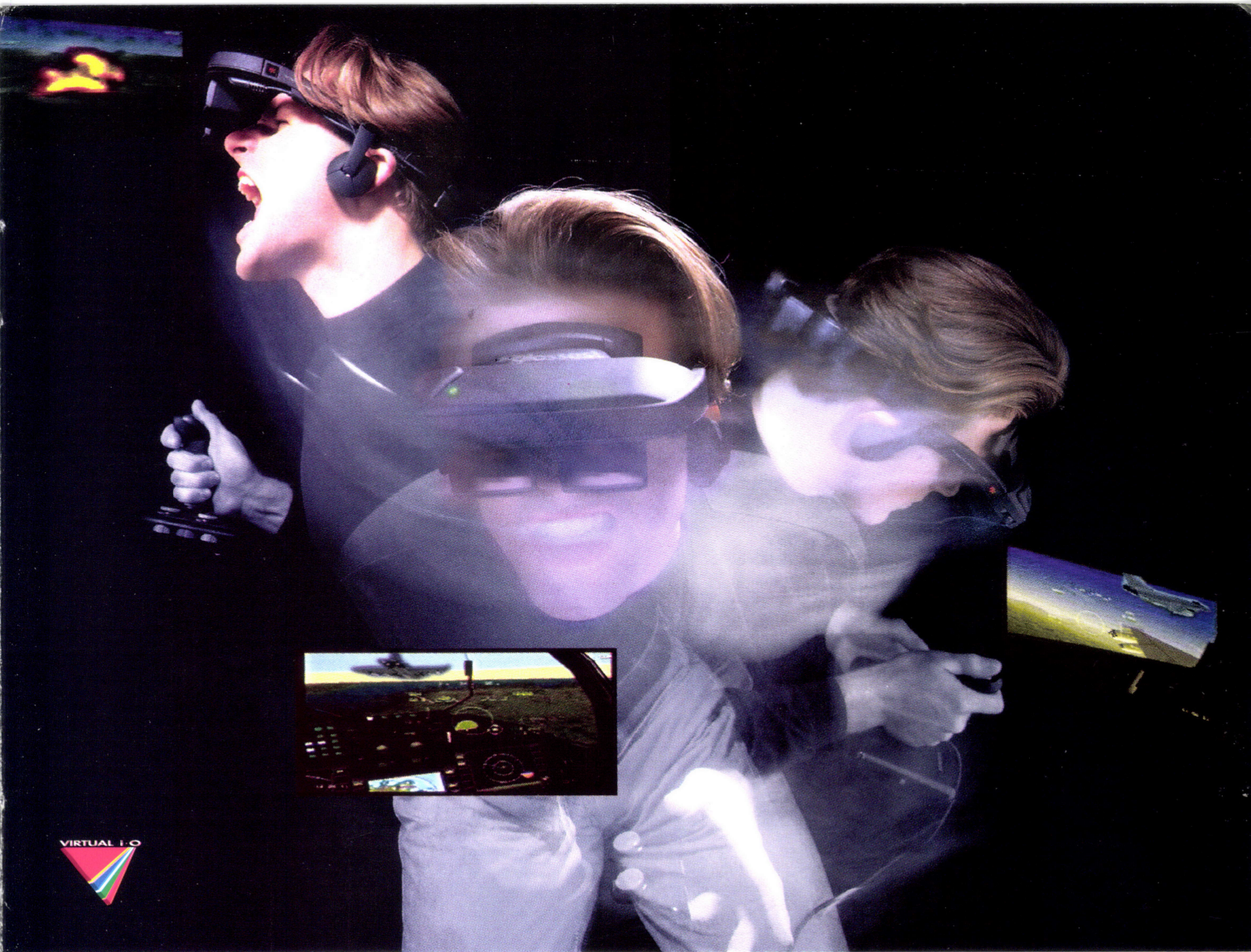
story goes (and this is 100 percent true, for those unbelieving in the power of the female anatomy) a high executive of Nintendo Company Ltd. was taken out to Hooters (the popular restaurant chain that employs well-endowed women to wait on customers) by some Paradigm folks during the production of *PW64*. He was so enthused by the whole premise behind the place that he decided to give the blond busty babe in *PilotWings 64* the name "Hooter." In addition to a possible breast reduction, Hooter's name will be changed to Robin for the U.S. release of the game.

JESUS of PilotWings 64



Okay—before we start getting dozens of phone calls from religious fanatics, we'll come clean. This ain't Jesus. Not THE Jesus, anyway (his name might be Jesus for all we know, we're not gonna rule it out). But the irony of it all is that he looks a hell of a lot like the holy guy in the sky, and strangely enough, he wasn't placed in the game on purpose. If you fly into a certain cave on one of the ice levels in the Japanese version of *PilotWings 64*, you'll see this frighteningly realistic image of a bearded man with a cross on his forehead. The explanation we received is that a texture was mapped onto a rock polygon in the cave, and when mirrored over to another face of the rock, created the image that appears here. Amazing indeed, but needless to say—the image will be altered (if you're wondering, this is the part that makes this fit into a page on censorship) if not totally removed from the U.S. version of the game.





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